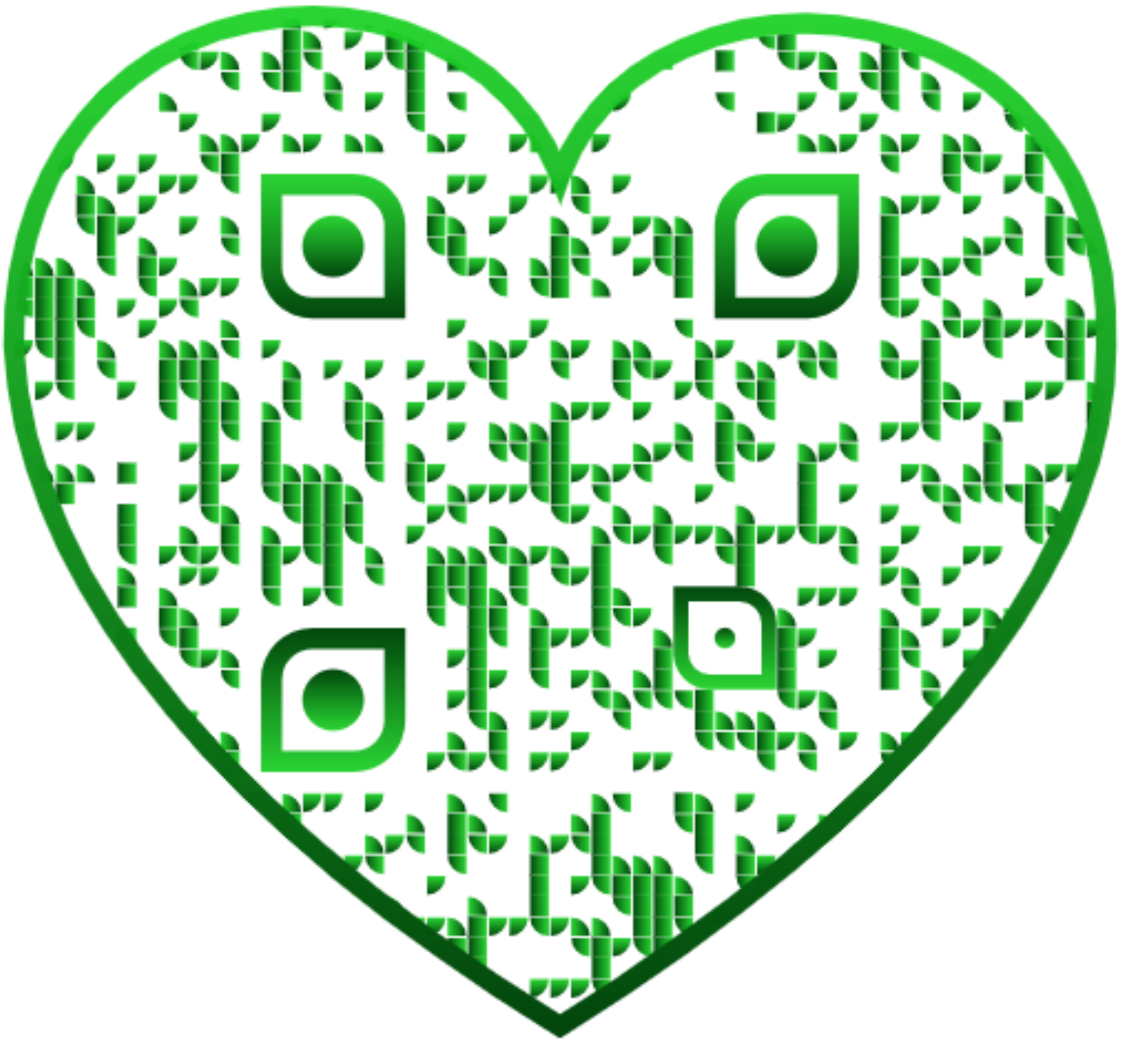
ZAYDEN STONE

MYTHICAL CREATURES AND MAGICAL BEASTS

An Illustrated Book of Monsters from Timeless Folktales, Folklore and Mythology

VOLUMES 1 & 2

LEGENDARY LORES



MYTHICAL CREATURES & MAGICAL BEASTS

An Illustrated Book of Monsters from Timeless Folktales, Folklore and Mythology: Volumes 1 and 2

Zayden Stone

The Legendary Lores Series

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A Summary

Have you ever been curious about the mythical creatures that are often mentioned in passing in books you read? Or about the magical beasts you see in movies?

This book is an attempt to tell their stories. Where did they come from? What relevance do they serve in mythology? Why are some so obscure, while others become enigmas?

Mythical creatures that we often seen as pop culture references today have a deep connection to the mythologies and folktales of ancient cultures.

This book is a bundle collection of Zayden Stone's first two volumes of *Mythical Creatures and Magical Beasts*.

About the Author

Zayden Stone is a self proclaimed folklorist. As a child, while he watched his friends play with action figurines, he was swallowed up by the world of mythology. He let the stories of ancient cultures transport him to imaginary worlds where magical beasts roamed the planet freely. He would often re-imagine these stories told from the perspective of these mythical creatures and would wonder what they would have had to say.

It has been a life long dream of Stone's to combine all the creatures that he has grown up reading about, into a comprehensive illustrated guide for others to learn from. This book is an ode to his own childhood fascination for ancient tales.

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Introduction

Before we begin this book, it is important to bring forth the difference between mythology and folklore to better understand the relevance and symbolism behind the mythical creatures we continue to hear of to this day.

Ancient Greeks called it mythos; the ancient Hindu civilizations called it mithya. The similarity of these words alone is reason enough to believe that so many ancient cultures' orally told tales were often spread by travellers and tradesfolk. Both mythos and mithya were often known as the polar opposite of 'absolute truths' or as the Hindus called it - sat. One cannot deny the relation of myth to certain truths. Mythology turned into phantasmagoric tall tales to explain the reality of the world as observed by many ancient cultures. Why did volcanoes erupt? What caused eclipses? While one cannot call myth a truth in the true sense of the word, the best way to explain it would be that mythology was often a perspective - or a version of the truth.

While it would be modern day scientific elitism to believe that the people of the ancient world actually believed in virgin births or flying horses; snakes that engulfed the entire world or serpents that swallowed moons; it would be fair to say that mythological tales were intentionally hyperbolic is nature to drive home a certain point or moral. Think about it? Which stories would have had a higher chance of continued tellings and retellings over generations - a story about a single headed, two handed man that had to fight lions and tigers and bears, or the story of a demi-God with herculean strength battling a multi headed sea serpent and a mammoth sized boar?

At the heart of every myth, folktale, or legend is excellent storytelling. For tales to survive for centuries by word of mouth, they must be compelling with captivating characters, events, and messages. A host of creatures populate these tales; some heroes in their own right and

many that are monstrous. This book includes a wide range of creatures from myth, folktales, and legends.

Folklore, in contrast to mythology, is more secular than sacred. It can be thought of as the body of traditional customs and beliefs preserved by storytelling. The stories often illustrate a particular message but without the spiritual element that myths have. For example, Adarna, a magical bird from Filipino folklore, has supernatural powers but is not linked to any gods and the other characters in the folktale are human rather than divine. Neither is it tethered to any particular historical event or real person; therefore, it is folklore.

Folktale and folklore, used interchangeably throughout this book, are very similar to the concept of mythological tales. However it is the link to the divine that separates mythology from folktales. At the core both mythology and folklore are hinged on the idea of creating a sense of community through campfire stories. At the risk of oversimplifying, myth is often sacred, folklore is a collection of fictional tales.

The scale of mythology and folklore also often distinguishes the two. Mythology is considered to have a much larger scale than folklore, and involves grand events and characters. For example, stories about how the universe began would be termed as mythology. While both mythology and folklore involve fictional stories and characters, mythical characters are often immortal beings who fight fantastical monsters.

Folklore is usually smaller scale stories and involves local surroundings, such as an explanation how a lake was formed, or the birth of a royal lineage. The types of adventures and deeds performed by these characters are also frequently smaller in scale, such as a clash of two families that gives a town its name.

Legends, in contrast, have a historical link, although the fantastical elements of the story are not historically verifiable. Like folklore, legends usually have a supernatural element and are about humans instead of gods and their offspring. However, legends can be linked to a

real person or an actual event. For example, the metal-loving Alicanto from Chilean legend is a supernatural bird linked to Juan Godoy and the 1832 Chilean silver rush.

As far as mythological beasts and folktales creatures go, however, the distinction tends to be more blurry. Some creatures exist to warn children of nearby and everyday dangers in folktales, while the mythological beasts often showcase Gods and heroes as legends and serve explanations of a more ethical or moral nature.

The mythological beasts in this book are from different cultures and different ages in history. I have always been interested in fantastical creatures and monsters and each creature in this book, however obscure, has been carefully chosen and researched. Original sources have been hunted down where possible and available information has been critically analyzed to piece together an accurate and interesting picture. The creatures and their stories often change over time; this is a natural part of how stories and their characters evolve to remain relevant to the people telling them.

Each creature has its own illustration and begins with a fictional narrative. The creature's appearance and characteristics follow to compliment the illustration and then a retelling of its story, or one of the stories it features in. There is also an analysis of its interpretations and what the creature symbolizes.

The mythical beasts are presented in categories that have been specifically chosen as they are consistent across different cultures and periods in history. The categories are arthropods for insects, crustaceans, and arachnids; avian for birds; canines for wolves and dogs; serpents for snakes, including water snakes; ungulates for hooved animals like horses and cows; and aquatic for water dwellers such as whales. Creatures in a section may be in the form of that animal, hybrids of that animal, or able to shapeshift from or into that animal. Presenting the creatures in categories makes it easier to see what themes and messages the creatures from different cultures and ages have in common. You will

find some overlapping themes across different cultures that point to universal ideas in how humans perceive the animal.

If you wonder where your favorite creature is, you will probably find something of them within these pages, even if they do not have their own chapter. For example, the ever-popular Pegasus can be found in the tale of the Gorgon sisters. He also had a half-brother, Arion, who features in the ungulates section, and there is a brilliant white-winged horse from Islamic tradition which may sound very familiar to Pegasus as well, helping you draw in more parallels to stories told across cultures.

The messages these mythological enigmas convey are often about explaining natural phenomena, aspects of human behavior, or teachings about the behavior of animals, something vital for survival in ancient times. Myth, folklore, and legend essentially provided a way for people to understand and cope with the world and extract some semblance of order and meaning from what could otherwise be overwhelmingly chaotic and dangerous. Just imagine trying to explain hunters going out never to return, death by snake bites, or a lunar eclipse, without any scientific knowledge.

The body of myths, lore, and legends from a culture gives insight into what that culture valued. It also shows what was dangerous in terms of certain animals or aspects of nature. For example, Inuit mythology emphasizes physical strength and understanding the behavior of animals because this could mean the difference between life and death in the harsh environment.

As humans built civilizations that lessened the chance of indiscriminate death by animals, myths and folktales—and their associated creatures—became more about living a virtuous life and avoiding suffering and misery. Many myths perpetuated the patriarchal society they were a product of, particularly evident in written accounts from Ancient Greece. For example, taming animalistic desires, like lust, is often portrayed as virtuous, and this is shown in lots of hybrid

creatures that lure men with their appearance of beauty.

Sometimes the beasts are heroes in their own right, such as the self-sacrificing bird Jatayu from Hindu mythology. Sometimes they are horrifying, like Typhon from Greek mythology, to make the gods look good when they defeat them. Because for any exciting story, the heroes need worthy opponents. After all, what would Hercules be without a fearsome hoard of monsters to overcome?

In ancient times, storytelling provided entertainment as well as practical and moral education. Common themes that can be found are explaining the unknown, cautionary tales that warn against dangers, explaining moral values, and spiritual messages to give a sense of hope and purpose. But if these stories were not entertaining and able to keep listeners captivated, they would have been forgotten long ago, well before any were ever written down. Instead, the stories live on, and their creatures are remembered, ready to be retold again and again. These stories, and innumerable others like them, were told when the sky grew dark, tribes and families sat together and shared a magical world to educate and entertain.

Section One | Arthropoda

Arthropods play many roles in human culture, especially in folklores, mythology and religions. Many of these aspects include insects that are important both economically and symbolically, right from the modern day honey bees to the scarabs of Ancient Egypt.

Anthropods with cultural significance include crustaceans such as lobsters, which are popular subjects in art; and arachnids such as scorpions and spiders, whose venom have medical applications.

Spiders have been depicted in ancient mythologies, religions and arts for centuries. They are often portrayed as mischievous due to their venomous bite, but can be seen as symbols of power since they produce webs that wait for prey.

For example, Tarantella is an Italian folk dance that is said to remove the poison from those who have been bitten by the tarantula wolf spider, lycosa. The dance itself dates to the fifteenth century and was once considered a cure called tarantism, which was caused by a spider bite. The Moche people had a fascination with spiderwebs, often putting them in their art and depicting spiders as prominent figures in their culture.

The scorpion appeared as the astrological sign Scorpio in 600 BC, when Babylonian astronomers created the twelve signs of the Zodiac. In South Africa, the Scorpion has a significant cultural meaning and its motif appears in art and culture extensively.

The Scorpion was seen as an embodiment of both good and evil. For example, to counteract the power of the scorpion, ancient Egyptians worshipped Serket as a goddess that protected Pharaohs from the powers of evil. But you will find scorpion details woven into Turkish Kilim flat weave carpets as protection to ward off evil forces.

Chapter 1: Arachne

Origin: GREEK Mythology

All eight of her eyes narrowed on to her prey and he approached the glistening weave of threads she had spun. She hisses; her forked tongue tasting the scent of him in the air. She is proud - she knows not one prey can ever escape the strength of her weave. Once trapped, her

prey will only be spun further and more furiously into a cocoon of her embroidery, where he will await his fate - to become a meal.

***

This is the tale of Arachne; Greek mythology's first spider. But Arachne was not born a spider. Arachne's story begins as a beautiful woman with long black hair and pale skin; a woman who grew up at the foot of a loom to become one of the greatest weavers of all time.

The daughter of a tradesman, who was known to dye the deepest shades of purple cloth, Arachne was no stranger to the world of fabrics. She was said to be born of a spindle that her mother, the nymph Ida, spun from oak and plum with Athena's blessing. It is indeed ironic that the very Goddess that blessed the birth of Arachne was the one that called for her end.

Arachne's villagers would often flock to see Arachne's work. They were all in awe of the fine tapestries that she created. They would watch as she created flowing fabrics, as if thread would grow directly from her fingertips. Praise for her work continued, but it all came at a cost.

Arachne grew more proud by the day of her talents and would often publicly shun the idea that her gift was one from the Gods. She would often go as far as to claim that her artistry was beyond anyone else's, whether a mortal's or even a God's.

It was only a matter of time before Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom would come to hear of Arachne's claims. Once she did, she chose to teach Arachne a lesson.

One fine day, as Arachne continued to weave in public, surrounded by her admirers, Athena disguised herself as an old woman and approached Arachne to remind her to be thankful for the gift that the Gods have anointed upon her. Arachne scoffed. Without even looking

up, she berated the old woman and declared that no Goddess can have the talent that she has, so how would they even gift such a skill to any mortal. Arachne continued to claim her talent was inborn and unmatched by any other.

At this point, Athena was irked and revealed her true self. She challenged Arachne to a weaving duel for continuing to defame the Gods. Even at this point, Arachne had too much pride to accept that she had erred, and instead accepted the challenge. Three days is what Athena gave Arachne to prepare, and as the third day dawned, Athena appeared, as the crowds gathered.

Different Greek myths have different angles to this part of the story. While some claim that Zeus was called to judge the competition, others claim that Athena called upon nymphs to decide who the greater weaver was. Regardless of who judged the challenge, the story continued something like this:

Athena drew strands of grass, puffs of clouds, and all the colours from the flowers nearby, to weave a tapestry that showed the Gods in all their power - Poseidon riding the waves, Zeus firing thunderbolts, Apollo speeding across the skies. Athena was illustrating the might of the Gods and how their lives dwarfed over mortal life. On the flip side, Arachne continued to mock the Gods even in her weaving. Through her intertwined threads she depicted Zeus as a philanderer who shape shifts to ensnare women. Arachne showed no fear in depicting Zeus in the most unflattering of ways.

The tale of Arachne’s transformation begins here, and different Greek mythologies tell them differently. While most of the tales show that Arachne’s tapestry was in fact superior to that of Athena’s, which raised a fiery temper within the Goddess, some tales show that Arachne was finally shown that she cannot out do the Gods. In those stories, Arachne is shown to have become humbled after the challenge, but sadly, one of the conditions of the challenge was that, should Arachne lose, she will have to give up the loom for her entire life. Upon losing,

not only was Arachne taught a lesson in humility, but she grew extremely depressed at learning she will never be allowed to practice her craft again. As a show of the Gods' mercifulness, Athena decides to turn Arachne into a creature whose livelihood depends on its ability to weave. Athena told Arachne that she will show pity on her and allow her to continue to weave, and before Arachne could even rejoice at the idea or conjure in her mind what tricks the Goddess may be up to, Athena began to transform her.

Arachne could feel her body contorting, multiple eyes grew on her face, legs emerged from the side of her body, and thorny black hair sprouted all over her body. As a final touch, Athena left her with a single spool of thread that unwinded from her torso.

In other Greek tales, where Arachne had in fact won the competition, it was Athena's rage that made her tear up Arachne's tapestry and break her loom and turn her into a hideous creature with multiple legs and eyes. Athena apparently left that spool of thread to remind Arachne of her human talent. For centuries that followed, Arachne and her offspring now knew how to weave webs from the threads that emerged from their bellies, as if to taunt the Goddess Athena, that even without human form, they continue to weave, and perhaps still better than what the Gods can do.

Chapter 2: Tsuchigumo

Origin: JAPANESE Mythology

He narrowed down on his next prey. Yet another wanderer who strayed into the vast countryside and the remote fields. The creature could wait no longer; he had hungered for flesh for days. But he was patient, sure this prey would be his for the taking. After all, all the travelers

always noticed the cave and saw it as a great place to take respite for the night - protecting them from nature's forces. As this new traveler made his way to the cave, the creature was preparing his deadly snare. Little did the traveller know that he was going to be number 1,990.

***

This is the tale of Tsuchigumo; Japanese mythology's spider creature from their demonology tales. Tsuchigumo are crawling apparitions in Japanese mythology that dwell in the mountains and forests, weaving their silk tubes along which they wait to ambush prey. Tsuchigumo rely on deception like other yōkai do, but what makes them unique is their spider-like behaviour.

The Tsuchigumo appears in the legend of Minamoto no Yorimitsu, who served the regents of the Fujiwara clan in Japan. He was known to take violent measures that the Fujiwara would themselves shy away from. He is one of the earliest Japanese legends of historical note for his military exploits.

He was a part of many stories and lore, some true, and some dramatized for effect. His mythological story starts when he fell ill during one of his quests for a giant demon skull. A mysterious priest named Tsuchigumo no Seijitsua would show up each night to medicate him to cure him of this illness. Many moons passed, but Minamoto no Yorimitsu was not healing. One of Yorimitsu's retainers, Kinmon Goro Munezo, grew suspicious of this nightly visitor, and was one day able to reveal his true identity by revealing Tsuchigumo no Seijitsua's true reflection in a mirror. Yorimitsu grew alarmed when he saw a grotesque spider-like creature, and tried to slash the demon in half.

The Tsuchigumo managed to escape, but he left behind a trail of blood that led Yorimitsu and his retainers right into Tsuchigumo's lair. There Yorimitsu found that the spider-demon had slithered into a hole and sent its children out. This was when Yorimitsu became aware of

how truly dangerous Tsuchigumo was. After failing to find any more traces of the demon's presence, Yorimitsu had to take one of his retainers as a hostage and slit his throat to lure the Tsuchigumo out. This is when the spider demon was slaughtered using the *Kumokirimaru* and thousands of spiderlings fled from its belly. Yorimitsu’s sword was thereafter known as the "Spider Cutter".

In another legend, a tsuchigumo took the form of a beautiful warrior woman and led an army of yōkai against Japan. With knowledge of magic and experience in combat, Yorimitsu's first attack was a strike to the tsuchigumo directly.

The direct blow to the warrior women, lifted the illusion she had cast. Her army was not real, and disappeared into a ball of smoke, blinding Yorimitsu's army temporarily and giving her time to escape.

Slithering up the mountain to an opening hidden among natural spider webs, the tsuchigumo thought it was safe. However, the army of Yorimitsu tracked her down with the trail of blood it had left behind from the first blow cast by Yorimitsu. His army entered into battle against its mistress once she was found; found as a giant spider demon! Yorimitsu sliced her abdomen open with a single swing of the sword. To his shock, a thousand baby spiders swarmed out of her belly, but Yorimitsu and his retainers managed to kill every last one before returning as victors.

In ancient Japan, tsuchigumo was used as a derogatory term against aborigines who did not show loyalty to the emperor of Japan. There is some debate on whether the mythological spider-demon or the historical clans came first. Tsuchigumo may have been an obscure myth, but it was soon picked as the preferred term to label a more humble threat to the empire.

Alternately, the word tsuchigumo has been identified as a derivation of an older derogatory term, tsuchigomori, which roughly translates as '*those who hide in the ground*'.

Many of the rural clans' common practices included utilizing existing cave systems and creating fortified hollow earthen mounds for both living and military purposes. This furthers the idea that the use of the label for renegade clans began essentially as a pun, and over time turned into tales of an intelligent race of, occasionally anthropomorphic, spiders.

Chapter 3: Myrmidons

Origin: GREEK Mythology

The sickness spread through the entire island like wildfire; not one villager spared, not one beast tolerant to the disease. As the days passed, the skin began to melt off the bodies of the islanders that didn't die instantly from Hera's curse. The entire island began to reek of the

stench of decomposing human and creature flesh alike. Within weeks, Hera's act of jealousy was complete. Her plague had destroyed all life forms on the island, or so she had thought. When Zeus tread on the island to see the havoc Hera had caused, he noticed the ants of the island - still toiling away and growing their cities, unaffected by the cure of the plague. Immediately Zeus cast a spell upon the ants. Before his eyes, he saw these tiny creatures morph. Their bodies grew bigger at first, their limbs collapsing down to four. Their pincers transformed into a set of human lips, their abdomen reshaped into a human torso. Before Zeus could rejoice at his glory, an entire army stood before him - a new race of people.

***

These are the Myrmidons; legendary inhabitants of Thessaly in Greece. They were known for their fierce devotion to Achilles, the king who led them in the Trojan War. Known for their brute strength and the possession of hive mentality-like strategies in battle, they were known to be defeatable only if their leader was to fall. Historically, the only real army to come close to this sort of tenacity were the Spartans. One must wonder if the fictional writings of an author can directly influence the development of an entire army, or is there perhaps any truth to this mythological army of any-men? Did Greek authors in fact draw from observation and not their imaginations? In fact it is well known that the battle strategies of the Spartans, where soldiers huddle close together to create a strong wall that not only protects each other but almost acts as a battering ram heading towards the enemy, was finessed and mastered by the Romans. And to think this all began from an epic tale like the Iliad or within an infamous Greek Poem, Work and Days.

The word "Myrmidon" is a combination of two Greek words: *myrmex*, meaning "ant", and *demos*, meaning "a person or people". Myrmidons are referenced in many Greek stories. One of them is by Hesiod in his poem *Works and Days*.

Hesiod advises an honest working life which is the source of all good. He feels that both gods and men despise those who are not hardworking enough to work.This is why Hesiod must have taken an interest in the myth of Myrmidons. He showed them as human beings

who labored underground for gold that was guarded over by ants.

In Homer's tale of Iliad, the Myrmidons are the soldiers commanded by Achilles. Their ancestor was Myrmidon, who was a son of Zeus and Eurymedous, a princess of Phthiotis. She was known to have been seduced by him in the form of an ant. Essentially Homer's version is an etiological myth, explaining the origin of the Myrmidons by expanding upon their supposed etymology. The name in Classical Greek was interpreted as "ant-people", from *murmekes*, which was first mentioned by Ovid in Metamorphoses. In Ovid's telling of the tales of the Myrmidons, he claimed them to be simple worker ants on the island of Aegina.

The origin of the Myrmidons seems to have been connected to an act of jealousy in other Greek tales. Hera, the queen of the gods, had sent a plague to kill all the human inhabitants of Aegina because the island was named after one of the lovers of Zeus. The ants of the island were unaffected by the sickness, so Zeus responded to Hera's act of jealousy by transforming the surviving ants into a race of people, the Myrmidons. They were as fierce and hardy as ants, and intensely loyal to their leader. Because of their antly origins, they wore brown armour.

Here is a fun fact that not only did Ancient Greek get wrong, but so do modern day pop culture enthusiasts. Ants are mostly female. Males that exist within an ant colony live for a very short period and only to serve the queen ant. Imagine if Hollywood was to take this societal norm amongst the ants into consideration. Perhaps we would have seen a very different Myrmidon army that was led by Achilles in the movie Troy.

Chapter 4: Jorōgumo

Origin: Japanese folklore

A wild knocking on the door woke the newly wed couple. The husband looked out the window to see that the torrential storm had not weathered. The wife couldn't understand who would be out on a night like this, and at an ungodly hour such as this. They both walked towards the door, where they could now hear a faint 'please open the door' in between the pounding on the frail wooden door. Their mind was comforted at the sound of a woman. They hurried to the door to open the door, where they saw a woman, drenched to the bone; her back hunched to

shield what could only be a baby in her arms. 'Please help', she implored 'My baby won't survive the night'. The couple was quick to let her in. She asked if they could hold her baby as she managed her dripping clothes. Curious to see if the baby was breathing, the couple unwrapped the dry fabric. Before the couple could even let out a blood curdling scream, tiny little spiders had already made their way all over their face. As the hours of the night passed, the couple could feel themselves being eaten away from the inside, but the worst was yet to come. Their visitor had transformed into a massive beast with the torso of a spider. The last sound the couple ever heard was the sound of a biwa instrument as she wrapped them within her web before she dug her fangs right into their hearts.

This is the tale of Jorōgumo; Japanese mythology's infamous half woman half spider demon. Jorōgumo, whose name translates to 'binding bride', are said to come to be when a spider comes to be 400 years old; and on its 400th birthday, the spider gains strange powers and grows much larger. The Jorōgumo can now change its shape to a beautiful woman. It uses this shape, and its skill at playing the biwa instrument, to lure victims into traps. Many tall tales mention that she always ensnares handsome young men, while other tales mention no such discrimination when it comes time for her to feast. Once trapped, she binds her prey's feet and stores them away for later feeding.

In their spider form, the Jorōgumo are usually between two to three centimeters long, and are in fact real life spiders found in modern day Japan. They can grow much larger depending on their age and diet. These spiders have beautiful, colorful, and vibrant bodies. Mythologically speaking, their primary strength lies in their threads, which are strong enough to hold a fully grown man.

One of the most famous creatures from around the world, the Jorōgumo is known to live in in caves, forests, or empty houses. They can seduce a man with their conversational skills and they are indifferent, cruel, emotionless and heartless.

The Jorōgumo can be identified by looking at their reflection in a mirror. They will look like spiders even when they are not an animal- the human form of such a creature is just as dangerous.

The story of Jorogumo is one that has been told for generations and it has changed many times in the different villages. Stories about this

mythical creature can be found all over Asia, from Japan to China. The most common tale is that she appears as a beautiful woman or young girl and lures unsuspecting travelers into her home with the promise of love, only to then become an old woman who binds them with silk until they die.

In the legend of Kashikobuchi, Sendai, there was a Jorōgumo who resided in a waterfall. The people of the area outwitted her on being aware of her presence, by cleverly using a tree stump as a decoy. The Jorōgumo one day grasped the stump and pulled it into the water. When the Jorōgumo understood that it was being deceived, it responded with the words “clever, clever”. The Japanese term, Kashikobuchi, originates from this myth, and it means clever abyss.

There is another common tale in Japanese mythology that relates to this version of the Jorōgumo. It begins with an eel that lived in the clever abyss, who one day visited a man Genbe after shapeshifting into a beautiful woman. She warned him that the jorōgumo of the abyss was going to attack her the next day, and claimed that she could never match the jorōgumo in power and she needed Genbe’s assistance to defeat the beast. Genbe promised to help her, but as the new day dawned, he cowered and shut himself in his house. The eel lost her fight with the jorōgumo, and on learning this Genbe eventually died of insanity from grief and guilt.

The Jorōgumo appears frequently in works of fiction. In the book In Darkness Unmasked, the Jorōgumo appears as the antagonist, who kills female musicians, only to take on their appearance as a disguise to lure male musicians. In the animated show Wasurenagumo, the protagonist is a young Jorōgumo child. She’s sealed inside a book by a priest, and is released later, to embark on an adventure.

The Jorōgumo is one of the most dangerous shapeshifters in Japanese mythology. It takes on qualities of a beautiful woman to trap unsuspecting men. This myth has been spread as warning for many decades and people still take heed today.

Chapter 5: Scorpion Man

ORIGIN: BABYLONIAN MYTH

Gilgamesh had been wandering the wilderness for some time—he had lost track of how long, but he knew it was since he lost his best friend. At first, he hadn't been able to accept that his friend was dead. He'd stayed with the body, refusing to believe it, until the passage of time and progressing rot had made it obvious he wasn't coming back. After the funeral, he had ambled away, reliving the many adventures they had shared together. Now his friend was gone forever, and that made him realize acutely that, one day, he would be too.

Finally, Gilgamesh had realized what he must do. He pulled his lion skin tighter around his shoulders and walked down towards the opening of a tunnel between two mountains. He must get through—to discover the secret to eternal life.

He could see two gatekeepers standing guard. Maybe if he explained that he was two-thirds god, they would let him pass. He realized he was not as close as he thought; the gatekeepers were horrifically tall. As he approached, he saw they had powerful bird legs ending in sharp talons and human faces watching him with disinterest. One had its arms folded across its chest. As it turned to say something to the other gatekeeper, he saw its shiny black-shelled body ending in a terrifying scorpion tail; he swore he could see a pearl of poison on the end. It was a pair of scorpion-people, and he could not imagine they were about to let him through.

In the Babylonian creation myth, the goddess Tiamat made eleven monsters to avenge the murder of her husband, the god Apsu; one of these monsters was the scorpion-man. Scorpion-men feature in Babylonian poetry etched on clay tablets, and they are popular images used in many situations, from palaces to homes, thrones to ceramics, and murals to stamp seals.

To the modern reader, the name scorpion-man usually conjures up an image of a giant many-legged arachnid with pincers and tail, topped with the torso of a man. However, the original Babylonian version of the scorpion-man was quite different, and there were several distinct types. There were also scorpion-women, as told in the Epic of Gilgamesh. The scorpion-people guarding the gates to the otherworld were a male and female pair—they did ultimately let the hero-king Gilgamesh through to continue his quest for immortality.

Nevertheless, images of scorpion-people were of bearded men, and they were depicted in several different ways within the same period. The key identifying feature that they all had in common was the tail of a scorpion and that they were all two-legged. The most human-looking type of scorpion-man had a human head and torso, two human arms and legs, and the body of a bird or scorpion extending at the back, with a scorpion tail. This type of scorpion-man is almost always shown with their arms extended upwards in a supportive pose. They are often supporting part of a throne.

The second type of scorpion-man has human arms on a human body, as above, but it has bird legs and talons. It usually holds weapons, such

as a bow and arrow, and performs a protective, guarding role. The final type of scorpion-man has the body and wings of a bird, with two bird legs and no arms. Like the others, it has a man's bearded head and a scorpion tail. They all seemed to serve an apotropaic role to ward off evil.

On the 6th Century BC Babylonian world map in the British Museum, scorpion-men are listed as one of the types of creature that lives in the 'otherworld,' beyond the earth. Scorpion-men greet the dead when they enter the underworld, and they also guard the gates of Mount Mashu, the seat of the gods and entrance to the underworld. Mount Mashu is also the twin peaks of sunrise and sunset, which is why scorpion-men are considered the assistants of the sun god.

Scorpion-men are also called Girtablullu, girtab meaning scorpion, and lullu meaning uncivilized-man. After Tiamat's monsters were defeated by the god Marduk, the scorpion-men took on their supportive and protective roles on the side of the gods. The Enuma Elish clay tablets explain the role of Marduk in the Babylon creation myth and mention the first scorpion-man:

Before time began, gods came forth from the female and male primordial entities of the universe, Tiamat and Apsu. But the new generation of gods soon became unruly and out of control. Apsu proposed they be annihilated, but Tiamat was reluctant to destroy something they had created. The new gods overheard the conversation and killed Apsu and taunted Tiamat for her inaction. Tiamat, bereft at the loss of her partner, created eleven hybrid monsters and armed them for battle, one of which was the scorpion-man. There were also fearsome hybrids of snakes, lions, bulls, and fish. This made Tiamat a formidable opponent, and the other gods were intimidated, all except one. The god Marduk agreed to fight Tiamat on the condition that he would be made supreme god. With no other choice, the other gods consented. After brutal combat, Marduk defeated Tiamat and captured her monsters. They either entered the service of the gods, like the scorpion-man or were cast into the sea.

Historically, scorpion imagery was widely used to avert evil influences and bad luck, and the scorpion-men seemed to fulfill this role as popular motifs on a wide range of objects. They symbolize resolute defense and security for royalty and laypeople alike. Created to be frightening members of a monster army, they are fearsome guardians and protectors.

Chapter 6: Anansi

ORIGIN: WEST AFRICAN FOLKLORE AND Mythology

Ntikuma sat on the ground, watching his father trying to climb a tall tree. For some reason, he had a bottle gourd fastened to his stomach, tied on with a string creeper. Maybe this was something to do with his father's quest to collect all the wisdom of the world. 'Father, what are you doing?' asked Ntikuma. But his father did not reply; he was struggling to climb the tree because the bottle gourd kept getting in the way of his many legs. He climbed up a little and then fell down on his rump yet again. Ntikuma made a suggestion, 'Father, open your eyes! Why

don't you tie the gourd onto your back so you can climb?'

After another failed attempt with the gourd on his stomach, Ntikuma's father followed his young son's advice and climbed easily to the top of the tree. He sat on a high branch and spoke to Ntikuma. 'I thought I had collected all the wisdom of the world in this gourd,' he said, holding it aloft. 'I was going to hide it up here for safekeeping. But you have shown me some wisdom I left behind, so it all seems a bit pointless now…' And with that, Anansi the spider threw his gourd as far as he could, spilling wisdom out all over the land.

Anansi is a mischievous spider from West Africa and features in many stories that explain moral values and good behavior, such as sharing wisdom. A character originating in Ghana, in the Akan language, anansi means 'spider.' As a spider, Anansi's head is much smaller than his body, and this is because spirits taught him how to detach the top of his skull, which he accidentally stuck to his rear end. In some stories, Anansi and his wife, Aso, appear as human, so they have the ability to shapeshift. Anansi is usually depicted as a black spider with a cheeky anthropomorphized face. Rather than his appearance, it is his character that is important to the many tales he features in.

Anansi is a clever trickster who is adept at turning his weaknesses or failings to his advantage. Anansi stories spread from Africa with the slave trade to the Caribbean and beyond, so there are a wide variety of tales. There is much debate whether the Anansi stories are folklore or myth since in some areas Anansi is considered the son of gods, while others argue that Anansi is not worshipped, and divine links are thus not relevant to most of the stories. So even though most Anansi stories are considered folklore, some have a divine element like the following:

Anansi loved to talk and thought he would make an excellent storyteller, so one day, he visited Nyame, the sky god, who was the keeper of all stories. Anansi respectfully asked Nyame if he could buy the stories. Nyame replied that the cost was a python, a leopard, a fairy, and some hornets. Many people had asked for the stories, but none had been able to pay. Nyame was sure this was an impossible task and that the stories would remain in his possession.

Anansi went home and made plans with his mother and wife. His wife gave him many excellent ideas, and he followed her advice. To capture the python, he piqued his vanity by saying he was not longer

than a palm frond. While he ostensibly measured the python, Anansi tied him to the frond. For the leopard, he trapped him in a pit and hit him on the head. Next, Anansi pretended it was raining and tricked the hornets into a hollow bottle gourd for shelter, and closed the lid.

Now to catch a fairy, you have to be particularly clever. Anansi's wife made a little doll, and Anansi covered it in sticky sap. His mother gave him some mashed yam in a small pot to tempt the fairies. When Anansi had laid the doll and yam mash out under a tree, he hid. Soon a fairy came and spoke to the doll, asking if she could share the yam mash. The fairy became very cross when the doll did not reply and slapped her. The fairy's hand was instantly stuck. She tried to free herself with her other hand, but that became stuck too.

So Anansi took the python, leopard, hornets, and a very angry fairy up to the sky god. Nyame was impressed and gave all of the stories to Anansi, and that is how they became known as spider stories instead of sky god stories.

Some stories relate Nyame as Anansi's father and his mother as the earth goddess. Tired of his son's mischief, Nyame turned Anansi into a spider with only his wits to rely on. A common thread across all Anansi stories is thinking your way out of life's day-to-day problems. Sometimes Anansi teaches us a lesson, and sometimes other characters teach Anansi a lesson, and we learn from his mistakes.

Often presenting philosophical lessons in a comedic and informative way, Anansi the spider symbolizes cunning, humor, mischief, and perseverance in problem-solving. Though Anansi is known to deceive others for his own ends, his actions prompt laughter as a tool to convey the intended message. As Anansi often outwits larger opponents, he can be seen as an important symbol of resistance against oppression.

Section Two | An Ancient Aviary

Myths claim birds are magical, and that they speak to us. We heed their advice – they warn us of impending doom or great joys to come. In some cultures, the bird is a symbol for souls that have passed on.

It is said that the mythologies of many ancient cultures speak of birds as a sacred animal. From the classic raven to the chirping sparrow, there is something for everyone. However, some cultures hold more passion than others when it comes to their favourite winged creatures.

For example, in Egyptian mythology, the goddess who can be seen with an ostrich feather while she sits on top of a lotus flower; that's Isis. She was often depicted as sitting or standing among various animals including birds like geese and ducks because. Her son Horus was also considered an avian deity.

It was said that the gods of every nation were simply a different version of the same god. This idea is exemplified by many cultures' avian creatures, who all share similar characteristics. In Scandinavia, there are three sisters called 'the swan maidens' who can transform into swans and deliver messages to their loved ones from time to time. In Sumerian mythology, Utu is portrayed as a bird with two sets of wings – an outer wing and an inner wing representing the sun or daytime sky. Sometimes Utu was depicted with four wings instead of two, suggesting he may be related to heavenly birds like Anzu.

Knecht Ruprecht, the German Santa-like figure, is often shown riding a white horse and accompanied by roosters. The Norse god Odin was depicted with two ravens on his shoulders. In Hinduism, Garuda is said to be half man and half bird that serves as Lord Vishnu's mount and carries him across the Milky Ocean. Moreover in Burmese mythology, there are four guardian birds: peacocks (representing Buddhism), lions (representing Hinduism), dragons (representing Islam) and tigers

representing Burma's indigenous animist religion of Theravada Buddhism. The list goes on.

Chapter 7: Adarna

Origin: FILIPINO FOLKLORE

Maya limped on into the deepest part of the forest. She hadn't told anyone she was coming; they would have said it was too far, too risky, and that the old stories weren't true anyway. Her leg, twisted since birth, gave her an uneven gait and made her joints ache intolerably every day,

so this journey was fueled by determination. She was heading for the white tree where a magical bird was said to roost, she knew where the tree was, and she desperately wanted to be free of her pain. As she hobbled along the overgrown path, she herself began to question whether the rumors were true, could this colorful bird really heal her? If she could get there in time and hide quietly, the bird should come to roost at dusk, and she would see for herself—if it even existed.

Maya stumbled upon the white tree sooner than she expected and hurriedly hid behind a bush. Ensuring she had a view of the tree, she prepared to wait. But as she did so, she saw that the bird was already there, so still she hadn't noticed it before. At least part of what she had heard was true: it really was the most beautiful rainbow colors. She came out from behind the bush as the bird turned its head slowly and looked directly at her. She couldn't believe she had found it. The Adarna opened its beak and began to sing.

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One of the most well-known folktales in the Philippines is the story of the Adarna, a multicolored bird with seven magical songs. The story is thought to have originally been an indigenous tale, though it had picked up some European influences by the time it was written down in the 16th Century as the epic poem *Ibong Adarna*, literally meaning the Adarna bird.

Deep in the forests of the Philippines lives an endemic species of trogon (*Harpactes ardens)*, which is nicknamed the Ibong Adarna because of its beautiful colors. Though the Philippine trogon got its nickname from folklore, the folktale itself was likely inspired by the stunning Philippine trogon. Its Latin species name, *ardens*, means 'flaming,' referring to its brilliant colors. Males are the most colorful, with bright red, pink, purple, blue, and golden brown plumage with black and white patterned wings and a bright yellow beak; they really do fit the description. They are shy and elusive birds that hide in the darkest parts of the forest, just like in the folklore, but as far as anyone knows, their song is not nearly as melodic.

King Ferdinand of Barbania had three sons, Pedro, Diego, and Juan. The King was fondest of his youngest son, Juan, and his brothers were

very jealous. One night, the King dreamt his eldest two sons tried to kill Juan, and he became anxious and depressed.

When the King did not recover, he was advised that only the song of the Adarna bird could cure him, so he sent his eldest son, Pedro, to capture it and bring it to him. Pedro found the bird, but it lulled him to sleep with a song and turned him to stone by defecating on him. When Pedro did not return, the King sent his next son, Diego, but the same fate befell him. After a long wait, the King reluctantly sent his beloved Juan to find the Adarna bird.

On the way, Juan happened to pass an old hermit; his brothers had been rude to the hermit when they passed him. The hermit was impressed with Juan's good manners and character and decided to help him. According to the hermit's advice, Juan rubbed lemon juice into cuts in his skin so he would not fall asleep when the Adarna sang. He dodged getting turned to stone, and when the bird fell asleep after its seventh song, Juan fastened a golden thread the hermit had given him around the bird's foot. He rescued his brothers by pouring water on them, and they set off home together.

However, the older brothers were even more jealous of Juan; already the King's favorite, he had achieved what they could not. So, to claim the glory for themselves, they took the bird, beat Juan, and left him in the road. When they returned home, they told the King that they had captured the bird, but the bird would not sing without its true captor present.

Meanwhile, Juan had been found and healed by the helpful hermit and soon returned home, at which point the bird began to sing. Its first song cured the King of his malady and the second song apprised him of the truth. The distraught King was about to order his two treacherous sons to be put to death, but Juan begged that they be banished instead. With the elder brothers gone, peace and merriment returned to the kingdom, for now.

The journey to find the Adarna bird reveals the characters' intentions, strengths, and flaws, and the folktale highlights the value of moral fiber. Undergoing challenging ordeals gives people the opportunity to show their true colors, and the Adarna bird is the means by which people get what they deserve.

Three of the seven magical songs are included in the folktale: sleep, truth, and healing. Maybe someone deserving, under the right tree in the depths of a Philippine forest, might get to hear what the remaining songs are.

Chapter 8: Alkonost

Origin:SLAVIC Mythology

The calm of the sea made them weary. A silence like this was unheard of in these seas. And then they all heard it; the most melodious of tunes the sailors had ever heard. Some were almost instantly willed into a deep slumber; falling where they stood. Others were so mesmerized by the

sounds, that they forgot about the deep abyss that lay beneath.

As the melodies continued, ripples began to show on the surface of the water, soon turning into waves. The noise the waves made as they collided with their ship's hulls was a sound that brought them comfort; it reminded them of home, and the people who awaited for their return.

While the familiar would offer comfort on any other day, what was to follow was something they had only heard of in lore. Suddenly a piercing sound rang through the ears of all those gathered on deck; it was the sound of eggs cracking. Confused at first, the sailors soon understood what had taken place. The eggs of the great Alkonost had hatched on the bed of the sea. They knew it was only a matter of time before the watery depths of hell would engulf them. Lightning cut the skies in half and a thunderous noise followed. Waves in the distance grew taller by the second. Their ship was now surrounded by tall waves.

The sailors realized they had the misfortune of trying to traverse the seas, when the Alkonost's eggs were ready to birth.

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The Alkonost is a mythical creature that was said to have been born out of the clash of lightning and thunder. It appears as a bird with the body of a woman, but unlike other avian creatures its wings are mere feathers instead of being made from skin like most birds. She is known to have a melodious voice that can even hypnotise the deaf. She is able to immobilize her prey to the point where all they can hear are her delightful memories, with all other sounds fading away.

The origins of mythological creatures are uncertain, but scholars believe some may be based on the Greek mythology. The Alkonost was said to have come from a Greek kingfisher named Alcyone who was transformed into a creature-like being and renamed “Alkonost” after the mountain she lived in.The Alkonost is also said to be comparable to the Greek Sirens by virtue of their spellbinding vocal skills, and their half bird, half woman appearance. While the sirens were half women-half fish creatures, they too lured sailors into the depths of their water abode

through enchanting music and voices.

It's said that this creature will appear before someone is about to die or when there is great calamity in store for them- this accounts for why you might occasionally see it circling around at night during storms. But she is also the one who creates these storms. How you wonder? Well it is said that the Alkonost lays her eggs on a beach and then rolls them into the sea. When the Alkonost's eggs hatch, a thunderstorm sets in and the sea becomes so rough that it becomes impossible to traverse.

The Alkonost is a mythological beast that lives with her counterpart, the Sirin. They were once both considered to be birds of good fortune and regarded as protective spirits. The Alkonost guarded good fortune during the day, while the Sirin protected it at night. Russians carved their likeness on the entrance to their homes as a form of protection from bad spirits. Over time they became more well-known for their dual personalities; one being good, and the other with darker characteristics similar to Sirens in Greek mythology (though this idea changed over time). The Alkonost is seen as good, while the Sirin has been associated with darker qualities. Some accounts say that the Alkonost, or 'cast-off spirit,' would fly from one holy being to another as a way of gradually assuring their souls heaven. Meanwhile, the Sirin was seen as a swiftly moving, alluring creature singing songs to attract humans and then steal them away with sudden death.

Known to live on the magical island of Buyan, the Alkonost resembles a bird with scales, feathers and wings made of ice. The tale goes that the first Alkonosts were created by a powerful wizard who wanted to be able to stay warm during the winter season while he was living in his homeland.

The wizard went out into his garden one day when it became unbearably cold outside and decided to cast some magic on his last remaining plant - an apple tree. He breathed onto its branches and chanted until there was steam coming off them like breath on a foggy window pane. All at once, every single bough burst into bright white

flowers and from their centres came two beautiful birds with heads of women and bodies of pure, translucent ice. The wizard was so proud to have created them that he called out for his fellows to marvel at the feat and admire how well he had done.

But they were not impressed - in fact, one person laughed out loud and said that it looked like a bunch of snow-white worms wriggling about on some frozen apples. So from then on, these magical birds became known as Alkonosts or Snowy Ladies.

Chapter 9: Alicanto

Origin: CHILEAN Mythology

The miner looked up at the star-strewn sky. There was no moon tonight, and it was pitch dark up in the mountains. But after nightfall was the only time for this work. Through a gap in the cliffs, he saw it again—the glow of the Alicanto, flying not far ahead. He knew if he followed

it, the Alicanto would lead him to untold hidden treasures, or at the very least, silver and gold. He had heard that he could persuade the radiant bird to become an ally, to share its spoils with him if he pledged to share all of his future finds in return. Well, after a share of the Alicanto's treasure, he would never need to mine again! How hard could it be to fool a shiny bird? He was gratified to see he was gaining on the Alicanto, now perched on a rocky outcrop. This one glowed gold, he was going to be rich, or so he thought.

The Alicanto rose into the sky and started circling. This was it; he mustn't lose sight of the bird now. With greed building inside of him for all that he might find, the miner quickened his pace and kept the bird fixed in his sights. He came around the corner, eager to see if it was treasure or gold deposits, and stepped out onto thin air. The Alicanto looked on as another greedy soul plummeted off a cliff onto the jagged rocks below.

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Northern Chile is home to the Atacama desert, the birthplace of the legend of the Alicanto. During the day, this bird looks commonplace, but at night it glows with metallic brilliance. Some accounts say it is enormous; others that it is a large eagle or vulture with a graceful swan-like head—apart from its pointed beak. It also has a vast wingspan and long legs with sharp claws, fitting the description of the world's largest flying bird: the Andean condor which can be seen in this area. Setting it apart from the Andean condor is its appearance by night, as well as its diet of precious minerals. With its gleaming eyes and brilliant plumage, it appears like a beacon in the night sky. Its glow is such that it casts no shadow, even during the day when it disguises its radiance, and that is one way you can discern the Alicanto from other birds.

The Alicanto can shine gold like the Sun or silver like the Moon, depending on which precious metal it is fond of eating. Some legends say that the feathers are silver- or gold-tipped. There have even been reports of a very rare and beautiful green Alicanto that ate copper ore. Other myths claim them to eat a mixture of precious metals and ores and display multiple shimmering colors in their iridescent plumage. Its eyes emit a strange beam of light that can reveal hidden secrets, and

light up the darkest crevices. This ability comes in useful as they nest in dark caves.

There appear to be several commonly held misconceptions about the Alicanto bird that represent partial truths. The first misconception is that the Alicanto is flightless: this is the case only when the bird has gorged itself on precious metals and is subsequently too heavy to fly. It will then travel by running along the ground with its wings stretched out—this is why it chooses to roost near a reliable food supply. However, if it has grossly over-eaten, it cannot run at all and can only move slowly when full of precious metal.

The second misconception is that it is entirely nocturnal. The Alicanto does usually keep itself hidden during the day and comes out at night to feed. However, there are reports of sighting a large bird with no shadow during the day, which is seen as good luck and indicates that there are precious metals nearby. For this reason, miners, prospectors, and treasure hunters dream of spotting an Alicanto as a sign that they are focusing their efforts in the right place. They may even decide to search for the Alicanto during the night in the hope that they can follow it to riches.

Some people mistakenly believe that you can secretly follow an Alicanto without them knowing. But nothing escapes the bird's notice, particularly clumsy, noisy humans. They say that if an Alicanto sees you, it will simply vanish, finding a dark place to conceal itself. But this is if you are lucky. There are far less desirable outcomes of following an Alicanto. The bird has magical abilities that extend beyond its beautiful appearance and is said to possess the ability to read people's intentions—the worse your intentions, the worse the outcome. The Alicanto may deem you unworthy of finding her fortune. It will lead you astray and, with a flash of brilliant light, leave you dazzled or blinded, lost in the mountains. With darker intentions, excessive greed and selfish ambition will have you lead off a cliff to your death.

There is hope for those with a pure heart and benevolent intentions:

the Alicanto will allow you to follow it and lead you to the means for prosperity. And this is exactly what is said to have happened to Juan Godoy in 1832, marking the beginning of the Chilean silver rush.

Chapter 10: Gandabherunda

Origin: Hindu Mythology

Another devotee was missing. There were rumors; people captured by a demon king. Lord Vishnu was determined to rescue his followers but knew he would have to change his physical form to be successful. If the rumors were true, he would need to be something ferocious enough

to take on a demon king. So he transformed himself into Narasimha, part lion, part man, and went to see for himself. He found the demon king and the abducted devotees who had not forsaken Vishnu, despite being terrorized. In the form of the ferocious lion-man, Vishnu ripped into the demon king with knife-like claws and teeth, shredding him into thousands of pieces that scattered across the land. The devotees escaped, but the lion-man form of Vishnu barely noticed, still consumed by the red fires of rage. His fury did not subside with the destruction of the demon king; instead, it grew, consuming him. It was as if he had become a monster himself, bringing destruction whichever way he turned. So uncontrollable was his spiraling rage that he was becoming a threat to the existence of the very universe.

Lord Shiva, the destroyer, was called upon by the gods to control Vishnu's lion-man form, at any cost, in order to save the universe and everything in it. Shiva chose to transform into a winged lion in order to defeat the lion-man incarnation of Vishnu. But Vishnu's lion-man form was too quick, propelled by the power of his fury, he transformed into a terrible two-headed eagle that could battle any winged lion. Here was Gandaberunda, with his two-heads, and vast wings. The battle went on for eighteen days. Finally, with two mighty beaks full of razor-sharp teeth, Gandaberunda tore into Shiva's winged-lion form and feast on his hide. Following the defeat of the winged lion, Vishnu was able to regain control and return to his usual form. Vishnu's radiating peace transformed Shiva back to his usual self and calm spread across the land.

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Ferocious, powerful, devourer of winged-lions. But also a strong protector, able to contain his rage to safeguard the universe and restore peace. This is how the kite-like Gandaberunda, an incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu, is portrayed. There are many versions of the story with different endings, but the theme of controlling destructive anger with calm and peace remains.

Many images of two-headed birds can be found throughout India's history, such as peacocks, parrots and swans, but none as imposing as Gandaberunda—the ferocious warrior bird. Early depictions of double-headed eagles or kites were thought to have travelled from Turkey where there is a carving thought to be from 1000 BC. The design appears to have then spread across Europe (both Austria and Russia have used two-headed eagles in royal crests), as well as into India. The

two-headed eagle can also be found in the Buddhist tradition.

In Buddhist oral tradition, there is a story of Gandaberunda where the two heads represent two brothers. One brother came upon a delicious flower while his brother was asleep and ate it without waking him. When the other brother awoke and found out, he was furious. Out of spite, he ate a poisonous flower that killed them both. It is used as a warning tale to encourage unity; otherwise, you will perish like the two-headed eagle.

When depictions of the two-headed eagle reached Southern India they became known as Gandaberunda and the imagery was no doubt influenced by the brahminy kite that can still be seen gracing the skies. Gandaberunda was favored by ancient royal dynasties in the region and was a very popular image throughout Indian history with some uses persisting to this day. Karnataka state in Southern India has maintained the Gandaberunda as the official emblem of their government as a symbol of power and peace, inherited from the royal dynasties that preceded the formation of the state. The two-headed kite can also be found on coins, ornaments, monuments, temples and royal textiles. Gandaberunda even made a famous appearance on a Bollywood wedding sari, and is on the crest of Bengaluru Football Club.

In Hindu temples, Gandaberunda makes many appearances in carvings and paintings. To display his magical strength, he is often shown clutching elephants in his beak or talons. There are even earlier depictions showing him clutching tigers, and some of the representations are anthropomorphized with a mixture of human and animal features. One temple has an image inspired by the Vishnu and Shiva story called “The Chain of Destruction” and shows the Gandaberunda attacking a lion, which is attacking another lion attacking an elephant. A temple in Karnataka state has a pillar etched with the two-headed kite crushing an elephant in a show of strength. Accordingly, local farmers in the area believe that Gandaberunda will protect their fields from being raided by wild elephants.

As a symbol of power and protection, Gandaberunda fights the forces of destruction. But he also reminds us that it takes more strength to maintain calm in the face of fury and chaos and to use this to promote peace in the world.

Chapter 11: Jatayu

ORIGIN: HINDU MYTHOLOGY

While resting in the forest, the wizened King of the Eagles, Jatayu, heard the frantic screams of someone calling for help. Jatayu recognized the voice of Rama's wife, Sita, whom Jatayu had sworn to protect. The Eagle king was devoted to Rama; he quickly unfolded his

gigantic wings to pursue the sound of Sita's screams. Soaring through the skies at great speed, he soon recognized the flying chariot of the multi-headed demon king Ravana, with Sita struggling to free herself from his grip. Already advanced in years, Jatayu knew he was no physical match for the powerful demon Ravana with his many heads and many arms. Nevertheless, he was determined to be of service to Sita, even if it meant sacrificing himself.

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According to the Hindu epic Ramayana, Jatayu was a demi-god in the form of an enormous eagle, although he is sometimes also referred to as a vulture. He was the son of Aruna, and Garuda's nephew; they were also of avian origin. Aruna and his wife Shyeni had one other son, Jatayu's elder brother Sampati. According to mythology, the brothers used to compete to see who could fly the highest. One day, Jatayu flew too close to the sun and his feathers began to scorch and smoulder. Sampati spread his vast wings between the sun and his younger brother, protecting him but burning his own wings. Jatayu helped his injured brother to the ground but Sampati's wings were damaged beyond repair and, wingless, he never flew again. This act of self-sacrifice would stay with Jatayu for the rest of his life.

Jatayu explained his lineage to Rama and his younger brother Lakshman when they came upon him in the forest one day during Rama's exile. Rama and Lakshman mistook Jatayu for a demon at first, due to his sheer size and bird-like appearance. However, Jatayu spoke pleasantly to them and explained that he was a friend of Rama's father, King Dasharatha. Hearing this, the brothers inquired about his name and lineage. In telling his own story, Jatayu thereby described the genesis of all beings and from which goddesses each type of life form was born. Jatayu offers to help Rama while he is in exile, suggesting that he could guard their home. He cautioned them that the forest was full of predators and demons and that he could take care of Sita if Rama and Lakshman had to go out. Rama agreed and they continued through the forest together.

On the day of Sita's abduction, Jatayu's location is unclear, although Rama and Lakshman are tricked into hunting a golden deer by Ravana. Ravana, a demon depicted as having many heads and arms, steals Sita away in his flying chariot, so the famous Ramayana goes. Jatayu is the first to hear her calls for help. Even though he knows he is not a physical match for Ravana and is unlikely to be able to rescue Sita, he sets off in pursuit because he is determined to be of service even if he cannot save her. After catching up to them, Jatayu and Ravana engage in a vicious battle with clashing talons, sharp beak, and weapons. Jatayu fought valiantly but Ravana clipped one of his wings with one of his swords, though some say it was with a diamond-tipped arrow. Terribly wounded and bleeding freely, Jatayu was desperate to help Sita for his beloved Rama, and bravely continued fighting, even if only to delay their escape.

When his second wing was torn by a mighty blow from Ravana, no longer able to fly, he plummeted to the ground and crashed onto the rocks. With his eyes looking skyward, watching the direction of Ravana's chariot, he repeated Rama's name to himself. As Jatayu lay dying, Rama and his brother Lakshman came across him in their search for Sita. Jatayu told them of the recent battle and that Ravana had headed south towards the kingdom of Lanka. He then died and Rama performed the funeral rites, giving him a full cremation so he could attain salvation. Rama is even reported to have said that the loss of loyal Jatayu caused him more pain than Sita's kidnap.

The place where Jatayu fell was named Jatayumangalam in his honour, now known as Chadayamangalam in Kerala, South India. It is the home of the world's largest bird sculpture, a 61 meter (200 ft) long statue of Jatayu lying stricken on the ground. Other places are also credited with being the spot where Jatayu fell, such as Lepakshi in Andhra Pradesh. The village of Lepaksi translates to 'get up, bird' in Telugu, the very words Rama is said to have uttered to Jatayu. Vijayaraghava Perumal temple in Tamil Nadu also claims a connection to Jatayu as the place where Rama performed the funeral rites, as does a temple in Tamil Nadu. In 2016, the Prime Minister of India, Narendra

Modi, used Jayatu as an example of the first to fight terrorism in ancient times.

The information Jatayu gave Rama, that Ravana had taken Sita south to his kingdom of Lanka, enabled Rama to pursue and eventually rescue Sita, but it had cost Jatayu the ultimate sacrifice: laying down his life in defiance of tyranny and terror.

Chapter 12: Garuda

Origin: Hindu Mythology

The mother of the birds, Vinata, anxiously watched her remaining egg. She had been waiting for hundreds of years for it to hatch and the time was drawing near. She would not let impatience get the better of her again. Even with the serpents ruling over her home; her

marriage. She had broken her first egg early, eager for a son to support and protect her from her husband's other wife and her thousand serpent sons, while their husband was away meditating in the forest. But in breaking the egg, she inadvertently weakened her son, born not fully formed, and angry with her for her mistake. Oh, Aruna; she missed him every day even though she could see he pulled the chariot of the sun across the sky. Refocusing her gaze on the heat emanating in waves from her precious giant egg, the shell suddenly split open in a burst of fire. A glowing golden bird was rising from the egg, growing larger and larger in front of her eyes. Still larger and larger he grew, towering above her. He threw out his wings in a movement that shook the heavens. Even the gods took notice and begged for mercy from this huge fiery creature. He heeded them and shrunk himself down to a more amenable size. At last, Garuda was born.

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This is the tale of Garuda's birth, and from this dramatic entrance, he has been involved in many exciting adventures since. In Hindu mythology, Garuda is described as a giant kite. He is depicted in early Indian temples, such as the Badami cave temples in India, as far back as the 6th century.

Garuda is perhaps most famous for being the mount of the Hindu supreme god Vishnu. There is a particular story about how this came about as a consequence of Garuda's other escapades. After Garuda was born, his mother was tricked into slavery by her husband's other wife, Karuda, also known as the mother of serpents. Karuda was known for her cunning and ambition; she wanted her one thousand serpent sons to have more power than any bird.

When Garuda's elder brother Aruna heard of their mother's predicament he charged Garuda with securing her release from Karuda's clutches. Garuda immediately grew to a size so immense that one flap of his wings could take him anywhere in the world. He negotiated with the hoard of serpent sons who said they would release his mother only in return for the elixir of immortality, the *amrita*, held safely in heaven where they could not go.

Garuda agreed. With another flap of his colossal wings, he flew up

to heaven to ask the gods for the elixir that would secure his mother's freedom. But the gods did not believe him and thought he wanted the elixir to make himself immortal. In a rage, Garuda grew so large that one almighty flap of his wings scattered the gods across the skies, enabling him to snatch the elixir. On his way down from heaven, Garuda encountered Vishnu, who evidently did believe him. Vishnu requests that Garuda become his mount and in return, he will grant Garuda immortality.

When Garuda reaches the serpents' lair, he plays them at their own game. He presents them with the elixir but says they have to purify themselves before they can drink it in order to become immortal. While they hastily slither off to do so, Garuda frees his mother. When the serpents return, he feasts mercilessly on all of them. Garuda returns the elixir to heaven and enters into service as Vishnu's mount.

This story offers an explanation as to why many birds of prey eat snakes and why Garuda is often depicted as carrying a pot of *amrita*—as well as wings he sometimes has two or four arms. Another tale makes it clear that Garuda is immune to snake venom. This is why his image is so popular on charms and amulets to protect people from snakes and snakebites. In days of old, people left delectable offerings to both heaven and the underworld. Garuda represented heaven, while the many-headed snake, Kaliya, represented the underworld. Thinking his venom would be enough to protect him from Garuda's wrath, Kaliya insolently ate all of the offerings.

As Hinduism spread to Nepal and Southeast Asia, Garuda travelled with it. In Buddhism, Garuda represents wisdom and a whole race of birds rather than one individual. The Garudas are natural enemies of the serpents, with only the Buddha himself able to call for peace between them.

Though originally depicted in animal form, Garuda is often seen in anthropomorphized form with the body of a man but wings, beak or hooked nose, and sharp talons. Images of Garuda became more human-

like as his stories spread throughout Southeast Asia, but then he is said to have the ability to shape-shift into a human at will, in addition to changing his size. Many statues of Garuda can be seen throughout many Southeast Asian countries. Representations of Garuda are included in royal and military insignias and he is a national emblem in Thailand and Indonesia. He even forms the Indian air force coat of arms, representing courage. On one hand, Garuda symbolizes deadly speed, violence and military prowess; while on the other, he is beloved for symbolizing virtue, protection and hope.

Chapter 13: Hugin and Munin

Origin: Norse Mythology

Revna always came up here to think. To walk off her frustrations, to find answers. Sometimes just to get away from the day-to-day drudgery of the village. Today, the fells were blustery on the way up but strangely still by the time she got out onto the top. As if the wind had

decided to go elsewhere as she passed through the trees. The heather was in bloom, tiny purple blossoms in an otherwise brown-green spiky tangle, growing in swathes between the rocks. Most of the villagers complained about the bleak mountainous scenery, but she felt like it ran through her veins.

She heard a raven, the distinctive throaty chatter so different from any other bird; it was as if they were talking. A second raven glided gracefully down to land next to its mate. They didn't usually approach this close; come to think of it, they looked slightly larger than the usual pair she saw up here. She admired their iridescent plumage, marveling at how black could look so many different colors. They seemed to be walking along with her, hopping from rock to rock and chattering as they went. "All right, all right, are you trying to tell me something?" she laughed at the birds. They paused with her for a moment and then started croaking on again. That was strange, she thought.. Then the birds suddenly fell silent, looked at each other, and took off into the sky, soaring away into the far distance. She had just seen Hugin and Munin.

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The raven features widely in the mythology and folklore of the northern countries as a powerful magical symbol. They are intelligent birds and have a wide range of distinctive vocalizations, including deep sonorous croaks, making it sound as if they have something to say. This is no doubt why they feature so often in myths and legends from these mountainous areas. They are opportunistic carrion birds, which is why gathering ravens may indicate death. That is possibly why the sinister-sounding term for a flock is an unkindness of ravens or a conspiracy of ravens.

Arguably the most well-known ravens are Hugin and Munin (sometimes spelled Huginn and Muninn) from Norse mythology. In the Old Norse language, *hugr* means thought, but *munr* is harder to translate into a single English word. Munin is often called memory or mind as the word *munr* has connotations of thought with desire and emotion. Hugin and Munin are the Norse god Odin's two ravens. Odin, sometimes called the raven-god, is almost always depicted with two ravens. Examples of this can be seen on many ancient artifacts such as helmet plates, war banners, figurines—and even surviving tapestry fragments—from as far

back as the 6th Century AD. Pairs of raven brooches were also the fashion once, worn one on each shoulder as a reference to Odin.

Although Hugin and Munin do not feature heavily in many written texts, they have been passed on in verbal storytelling and were mentioned in 13th Century Edda poetry. This poetry indicates that each day, Odin sent them out to fly across the world. They would be his eyes and ears and return to his shoulders, telling him the news of the world. Thus, Odin increased his wisdom. The Edda poetry indicates that Odin fears for their return. Scholars have debated the interpretation of this as it could reference Odin's shamanic abilities to send his thoughts and mind out around the world via Hugin and Munin as his spirit animals. The poetry also states that the ravens were very astute at returning with information about who had been killed, consistent with them being carrion birds. One example of Hugin and Munin returning with this sort of news is the story of how Odin gained the Mead of Inspiration (also called the mead of poetry). It goes something like this.

There was a divine being called Kvasir who embodied wisdom, combining an intelligent head and a peaceful heart. He wandered the earth answering the people's questions, and everyone benefited from his visits. Two dwarves, the brothers Fjalar and Galar (meaning Deceiver and Screamer), heard of wise Kvasir and asked him to come and visit them to answer their question. They callously murdered him and used his blood to make mead that would give inspiration in poetry and scholarship. They had a taste for murder and soon killed a giant named Gilling and his wife. With poetic finesse from the mead, they sang exquisite songs about their murder into the night. The giants' son Suttung heard the song and stole the mead, hiding it inside a mountain and placing his daughter on guard. The dwarves bemoaned their situation the next day on the way to market while ravens were listening. Hugin and Munin flew back to Odin and told him of the murdered giants and the Mead of Inspiration inside the mountain. Odin was keen to recover the mead. After his signature disguises and trickery, he seduces the giantess guard, promising to sing songs about her beauty that will be passed down through the ages. He takes the mead, narrowly escapes,

and returns it to Asgard, where he provides inspiration to those he deems deserving.

As the Norse god of war and wisdom, it is particularly fitting that Odin is accompanied by the ravens Hugin and Munin, intelligent birds with connotations of life and death.

Chapter 14: Itsumade

Origin: Japanese Folklore

In Ancient Japan, a terrible plague was ravaging the land, leaving a trail of disease, suffering, and death in its wake. The ruling nobility hid in the palace and did little to improve the lives of the living or give dignity to the dead as the torment continued. The dead were not laid to rest nor given proper burials, leaving their spirits restless, seeking revenge and justice.

Late one night, a terrifying creature flew against a dark and stormy sky. This strange, enormous bird had a beaked human-like face and a long reptilian body. It flapped its feathered black wings and cast an ominous shadow as it flew over the land. It circled above the Imperial Palace, and a hideous screech filled the air to call attention to the anguish below, "Itsumade! Itsumade!" *To hear its piercing cry was a torment to not only the ears but to the mind as well. It returned night after night, its shriek striking panic and fear into the hearts of everyone who heard it. The monster thrashed its wings and bared its razor-sharp teeth as it shrieked through each stormy night. What had summoned this beast into the sky? For how long would it reign in terror? The nobles hid in the palace below, panicked and afraid that they may never know their freedom again, desperate for the first signs of the morning light…* "Itsumade! Itsumade!"

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Translated into English, the call of "itsumade" means "until when?" and is what gives the Itsumade its chilling name. Itsumade is a legendary monster with a jigsaw of body parts. It has a human face but with a bird-like beak lined with sharp and jagged teeth and a reptilian body akin to a dragon, with clawed talons and enormous wings with a span of almost five meters. It is a striking and terrifying figure who appears in the sky only at night.

According to Japanese legend, the Itsumade is drawn toward the torment of deceased victims of terrible or violent circumstances, such as plague, starvation, or deadly battles. While this creature remains shrouded in mystery, what we do know is enough to send a shiver down the spine. The Itsumade is called towards the plight of others to feed on the lamentation of the dead. It appears in the night sky to demand recognition for the victims' suffering and the suffering of others. The Itsumade would circle the sky all night long, its screams unending, frightening and shaming those down below into seeking justice for those who have been left to suffer. The Itsumade was drawn to situations where little was done to ease the victims' suffering, or souls that have passed away have not been properly laid to rest.

In some legends, the Itsumade is a tormented soul of a deceased victim. Their spirits are vengeful and are seeking retribution for the injustice they suffered when they died. They take on the form of an

Itsumade to get revenge for the dire circumstances of their own lives and deaths.

The first tale of the Itsumade appeared in the Japanese epic text “The Taiheiki” around 1334 in the Kenmu era. A plague was sweeping through the country, causing many deaths and untold suffering among the people. Whole villages were falling with no one to bury the dead. Every night throughout the epidemic, the Itsumade appeared and circled above the Shishinden, the Imperial Palace and cried out, “Itsumade! Itsumade!”, “Until when? Until when?” For how much longer must these people suffer? For how much longer must these corpses lie unburied?

The Itsumade struck great fear into the nobility who felt ashamed of their inaction, and they knew that they must respond. Thinking back through history, the nobles remembered the great warrior-poet Minamoto no Yorimasa. He had famously slain the nue, another hybrid monster from Japanese legend comprising some of the most frightening aspects of wild animals, including snake, monkey, and tiger features. Minamoto no Yorimasa, the warrior poet, was so successful he gained the moniker the Master of Arrows and was celebrated long after his death.

So the Imperial Court summoned the best warrior of the day, Okijiro Zaemon Hiroari, to the palace. They hoped he could slay the Itsumade like Minamoto no Yorimasa had slain the nue. When night fell, the Itsumade was circling above when Hiroari armed his bow with a whistling arrow. Hiroari was an expert archer: he shot the terrifying monster out of the sky. As it plummeted to the ground, the city was saved from the nights of terror.

In celebration of his triumph over the Itsumade, Okijiro Zaemon Hiroari was renamed Mayumi Hiroari. Mayumi translates to true bow, awarded in honor of his skillful archery on that fateful night against the Itsumade. The nobles of the Imperial Palace tried to make up for their neglect of the villagers. They arranged for the bodies to be buried lest

another Itsumade might come to take its place. Mayumi Hiroari's grave stands in Mayumi City in the Fukuoka Prefecture of Japan after his life as a famous and celebrated warrior. The Itsumade has no such monuments of dedication. Still, the fear that they can strike into the hearts of the living has been passed down throughout the centuries.

Chapter 15: Sirin

Origin: SLAVIC FOLKLORE

Maksim heard it first; it was a beautiful song. He dropped his tools to the ground and searched the skies, looking for the source of the vocalizations. He noticed a huge owl sitting in an apple tree, even though it was midday, and he was pretty sure owls did not have a voice like that. He moved closer, but the bird flew away, still singing. He ran after it; he had to know what it was saying to him. It was so enchanting, he could think of nothing else. All his daily concerns fell away, like taking off a heavy coat, and he felt light and joyful.

He ran and ran and saw that the bird was perched again in another tree; this time, it was facing him. And it had the lovely face of a woman; a small crown was perched on top of its dark plumage, topping off its serious expression as it sang its melodious song. Maksim was enraptured and could not look away. When the bird spread its wings and flew off again, he blissfully followed it. At the very back of his mind was a warning: this was the Sirin, don't follow it to your death. But he paid the half-thought no heed and blindly followed the bird as it flew out to sea.

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Sirin is a dark-colored eerie bird, usually an owl, with the head and sometimes chest of a woman. She is famous for her sweet, captivating song, which is so engaging that it has a mesmerizing effect and leads people to their ruin. Sirin's song was intended for the benefit of saints, giving them divine encouragement or messages, but mortals could not survive it and would lose their minds. Hearing Sirin's song made mortals forget all impermanent things and blindly follow her, even listening until they died in rapture. For this reason, people were said to try to scare Sirin away with loud noises which she could not stand, such as ringing bells and cannon fire. People attempting to scare Sirin away by these methods can be seen depicted in old woodblock prints. The same images show that Sirin has wings but no arms, whereas her sister Alkonost, who sometimes accompanies her, is often depicted with arms as well as wings.

The similarity of the names Sirin and Siren is not thought to be a coincidence. Just like her sister Alkonost, Sirin has been influenced by Greek mythology. The Greek Sirens used mesmerizing songs to lure unsuspecting sailors to their doom, similar to Sirin, and were also part woman, part bird. However, the Greek Sirens were more malicious in their intent. During the Middle Ages, Greek culture traveled northwards, and it is only natural that this included Greek myths.

In earlier pagan times, peasants' cottages were often adorned with pairs of wooden carvings of Sirin and Alkonost as they were considered protective birds of good fortune. The carvings would guard the entrance

to the household, Alkonost protecting it by day, and Sirin by night. As time went on, their personalities diverged, and they came to represent different aspects.

In traditional pagan folklore, Sirin and her sister are both from the otherworld island of Buyan, or Vyraj, a type of paradise where birds fly during winter migration and the souls of the dead reside when their earthly lives are over.

In the Slavic villages of ancient Europe, the day of Apple Spas was always celebrated to mark the beginning of harvest time at the end of the summer when autumn began. Until the Apple Spas day, Sirin, with her stern face, was said to inhabit the earthly realm. She would sit in the apple trees and sing a melancholy song, her tears falling onto the trees and growing fruit. No one could eat the apples before Apple Spas in case they were contaminated with Sirin's sorrow. On the day of Apple Spas, Alkonost, with her kind face, would fly into the orchard from paradise. She would laugh and sing a joyful song in the early afternoon, dispelling all misery and imbuing the fruit with healthful or even magical healing properties. After Alkonost's visit, the villagers would harvest the apples and celebrate their good fortune. They considered Alkonost a sign that the strength of love and faith was more important than money and power represented by Sirin.

At one time, it was said that Sirin only appeared to happy people because it brought them heavenly joy to hear her fabulous song. Sirin was said to be fleeting and pass quickly, just like happiness, which is why happiness and Sirin were both so hard to find.

When Christianity was introduced to the Slavic countries, Sirin was one of the creatures absorbed from Slavic folklore into Russian orthodoxy. Being able to keep some of their favorite beliefs persuaded more people to accept the new religion of Christianity. With the advent of Christianity, Sirin's home was transferred to the Garden of Eden instead of Buyan Island or the paradise of Vyraj. This is why Sirin and

Alkonost are both described as birds of paradise in later writings. Over time they became more well-known for their contrasting personalities; Alkonost was seen as good, while Sirin was associated with darker qualities, some even saying she was the messenger of the underworld. Because of this, Sirin became considered a harbinger of death.

Chapter 16: Strix

Origin: GREEK MYTHOLOGY

Carradora watched as the woman, carrying a young baby, clambered up the path towards her home. It was a steep and difficult route, but Carradora had no desire to live closer to the town. An arduous trek, combined with her infamous reputation, meant that only people who seriously needed help sought her out. It cut down on the time-wasters, usually.

The woman, out of breath, stood before her with a sickly infant. The child was a pretty thing but very pale, and Carradora knew exactly what the woman was about to tell her. The child was

losing color and getting worse each night, becoming weaker and weaker every day. Carradora had seen it before, and it angered her that other witches couldn't leave the innocent alone. If you needed to drink blood, take it from someone who deserved it. The child had long red scratches on her face, made by a sharp beak. If the mother followed her instructions precisely, Carradora would be able to save the child from the nightly visits of the Strix—before it was too late.

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The Strix craves human flesh and blood, particularly from children. Considered an owl, strix means screech-owl in Greek. Though mentioned often, the Strix's appearance was detailed once. Ovid described it as voracious with a large head, staring eyes, tearing beak, and hooked claws. Other sources say its beak was golden yellow and very sharp for feeding on live prey; it preferred blood but also feasted on entrails. The Strix had dark gray or speckled feathers that could be used in love potions, and its name was invoked in curses. Seeing or hearing the Strix was an evil omen because it symbolized civil unrest and death.

The mythical Strix was nocturnal and could be heard making terrifying piercing shrieks from the rooftops and trees. However, another creature screeches in the night, and the first tale of the Strix reveals how it was initially conceived when a woman was punished for not conforming to society:

Ares, the Greek god of courage and war, had a mortal granddaughter named Polyphonte. Polyphonte went to join Artemis, the goddess of the hunt and wild animals, in the forest, no doubt, instead of getting married and starting a family. This incurred the terrible wrath of Aphrodite, the goddess of love and fertility, who perhaps had plans for Polyphonte whom she had spurned. Aphrodite was enraged and swore revenge; and caused Polyphonte to become infatuated with a wild bear. When Artemis found Polyphonte and the bear together, it was her turn to fly into a fit of rage. Out of revulsion, Artemis turned all of the wild animals against Polyphonte and chased her from the forest. Terrified, she fled home.

Polyphonte soon gave birth to twins, two boys, who inherited some of their father's wild characteristics. They grew to be very big and strong, were insolent to gods and men, and upon meeting any strangers, they would devour them. Their cannibalism and complete lack of reverence angered Zeus, who sent his son Hermes to punish the twins. But before Hermes could sever their hands and feet, Ares intervened, and they decided to turn them into less dangerous creatures instead. The twins were transformed into a bird of ill-omen and a vulture. Their mother, Polyphonte, was turned into the Strix, a harbinger of war and strife, who cries by night and rests hanging upside down by day.

Although this account reveals that the Strix was originally based on a bat, some sources even saying the Strix produced milk. The Strix is now thought of as an owl and was passed on in folktales as such. Historically, of course, a bat was considered to be a bird, so the distinction was less clear-cut.

Ovid also described the story of Prince Procas, who at five days old was a victim of the Strix while the nurse was out of the room. When the nurse returned, the baby was drained of color and had scratches down his cheeks. The nurse ran to the nymph Carna and begged for her help. The nymph came and reassured the parents and performed several rituals that would prevent the Strix from entering the nursery again. The young Prince thereafter regained his color.

This story has been exceptionally well preserved in folklore, even down to the ingredients used to enchant the nursery window frames, such as the entrails of a piglet and specific twigs and herbs.

Folktales favor the link to witchcraft and the vampiric nature of the Strix, and sometimes the Strix is said to be a witch who can shape-shift. These folktales are likely to have been used to explain sickly, pale children with no other identifiable cause, and it is common for babies to scratch their own faces while they are sleeping, making it look all the more sinister.

Over time, Strix has changed from a woman turned into a bat as punishment to a witch that can turn into an owl to feed on young children. What remains constant is its eerie shrieks that can be heard in the night and the association with blood and death.

Chapter 17: Impundulu

Origin: AFRICAN FOLKLORE

Solomon had just sat down to read when he heard an urgent knock at the door. Strange, he thought; he wasn't expecting anyone. He looked through the front window on the way to the hall. A stranger in a smart gray suit was standing there. Maybe he was lost. "Hi, can I help you?" Solomon asked as he opened the door two-thirds, keeping one foot behind it since the chain was still broken.

In an odd monotone, the stranger replied, "You have annoyed my mistress."

“I’m sorry, your what now?” Solomon blurted out, utterly confused.
“My mistress, Umona. And now you must pay.”
Before Solomon had time to think, the stranger had transformed into a tall gray bird and lashed a powerful red leg through the opening of the door. A sharp talon bit into Solomon’s left knee and cut into his calf. The bird thrust itself against the door, but Solomon’s good leg stopped it. He quickly threw his weight into the door, slamming it closed with all his might. Umona, he thought she had taken it badly when he turned her down, but he didn’t realize she was a witch with a lightning bird in her service. He tried to remember if the back door was locked.

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The Impundulu, or lightning bird, features in the African folklore of many different peoples, such as Zulu, Xhosa, Bhaca, and Nguni. It manifests as a bird associated with a lightning bolt, and the sound of thunder is the Impundulu flapping its wings. It is sometimes said that men will only see the lightning, but women can catch a glimpse of the bird if they are close enough to see where the lightning strikes the ground.

The Impundulu rides to earth on the lightning to lay its eggs underground wherever the lightning strikes. If the eggs are left to incubate in the earth, it will bring bad luck to the area when they subsequently hatch. For this reason, witch doctors will try to remove the eggs, but this very act could bring good or bad luck. The eggs themselves are said to have magical properties and can cause your enemies to be struck by lightning if the curse is performed correctly. If the witch doctor is quick enough, they might be able to catch the Impundulu, snatching it from the lightning.

Reverend Donald Fraser was a Scottish missionary who worked closely with local people in Malawi from 1896–1925 and wrote extensively about his experiences. One day, one of Fraser’s students was struck and killed by lightning while he sat by the fire. It was not uncommon for people to be killed by lightning, and Rev. Fraser observed that local people believed lightning to be a bird. He asked the night watchman if he had ever seen the lightning bird. The night-

watchman explained that while he had never seen it himself, a girl in his village had seen one recently. The girl was working in her garden when the lightning bird splashed down into a pool of water beside her. The night watchman said he was surprised to hear the girl describe it as a large bird because they had all imagined it to be small. She said it was large and black with a long tail, like a cockerel. From the pool, the bird ran up her hoe and scratched her body with its talons, and then flew back up into the clouds. It had left curious marks on her body that the night watchman had seen, and he said they even kept one of its feathers. This account is consistent with lightning traveling through objects and leaving unusual-looking scars.

In addition to being associated with lightning, the Impundulu can also be the familiar of a witch. But in Bhaca folklore, in particular, the Impundulu has even more sinister characteristics. People believed that a witch could be anyone; you would never know because they would use an Impundulu to do their bidding. Witches could control the Impundulu, and as the bird lives for a very long time, it would be passed down from mother to daughter. Without a mistress to control it, the Impundulu would rampage as a monster, causing chaos. The Impundulu would appear to its mistress as a handsome young man in a gray suit, ready to receive instructions. Its special talent was transforming back into a bird to kick the witch’s enemies to death.

The African secretary bird is known to kick, stamp, and peck its prey to death and has the red legs, black and white plumage, long tail, and interesting head feathers often mentioned in Impundulu descriptions. However, the title lightning bird is usually given to a much smaller gray-brown bird, the hamerkop. The hamerkop has a habit of calling loudly before it rains, so people thought it could summon storms, and if you stole its eggs, you would be struck by lightning.

People believed that lightning, and therefore the lightning bird, was an evil influence that needed to be warded off. It was often thought to be controlled by witchcraft, further increasing the Impundulu’s evil and malicious reputation.

Chapter 18: Huma

Origin: PERSIAN FOLKLORE

The egg fell through the sky, from above the clouds, hurtling towards the earth far below. The golden shell had begun to crack in several places. The wind whistled by as a small beak protruded, pushing a piece of shell away. The small bedraggled being wriggled and squirmed until it was free, but it was still hurtling through the chill air. As it tumbled head over heels, it opened one eye and then another. The brightness of the morning lit up the patchwork of fields and dirt roads looming larger and larger. Long colorful feathers were beginning to grow from

its body, and as it neared the ground, the bird thought its first thought. In fear of striking the ground, the chick let out a shrill cry. Just in time, it stretched out its wings and swooped gracefully off into the air, no longer a bedraggled chick but a magnificent Huma bird.

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Huma is the bird of paradise from Persian folklore. It spends its life in constant flight, even being born in the air, and never touches the ground. It comes to earth only to eat, but as it is a compassionate creature, it does not kill other animals but scavenges carrion instead. This is consistent with many believing it to be akin to a bearded vulture, although it is often depicted as a peacock in mosaics and other decorations. Persepolis, the ancient capital of the Persian Empire, had many images and statues of Huma.

Huma has the long wings and hooked beak of a vulture and the long neck and tail of a peacock. Although it lays eggs, it is considered both male and female, the two natures residing in a single body. Huma birds lived a very long life and died in their own flames to be reborn again, inspiring the later Phoenix.

Catching a glimpse of Huma would make you happy and content for the rest of your life, and even its shadow falling on you would bestow great blessings. It was considered a sacred bird that could not survive capture, and anyone who tried to injure it would die within forty days.

It is a bird symbolizing extreme good fortune, and believing in it gave people hope and confidence. Above all, it gave people faith in the legitimacy of their rulers since it was well known that if Huma’s shadow lingered over your head, or Huma alighted momentarily on you, you were destined to become a king. In fact, the feathers in the turbans of Persian rulers were said to be Huma feathers.

Within the Royal Collection Trust, in England, lies evidence that the Sultan of Mysore took this idea seriously. With the fall of Sultan Tipu, a

golden Huma figurine was found suspended above his throne. The ornament is a solid gold peacock-shaped bird, around the size of a pigeon, with its wings outstretched to give the appearance of hovering. It is inlaid with an array of precious rubies, emeralds, diamonds, and pearls. Perhaps it even cast a shadow directly onto the throne.

Folklore featuring Huma usually focuses on its role legitimizing royalty or its compassionate nature:

A woodcutter was resting under a tree on his way from the forest, his bundle of firewood beside him. He hadn't the energy to carry it to the merchant just yet, but his family would not eat until he did. He would just have a short rest. As he fell asleep, Huma flew over him and was moved by the woodcutter's poverty and suffering. Huma wanted to help him and laid a golden egg on his bundle of sticks. When the woodcutter awoke, he saw the egg and imagined the food he could buy for the evening meal if he sold it. When the cunning merchant saw it, he paid the woodcutter a measly price, saying one golden egg was not that valuable, but he would like to buy the bird that laid it.

At the same time the next day, the woodcutter rested under the same tree with a bundle of sticks but only pretended to be asleep. Huma saw him still barefoot and in the same threadbare shirt and thought he must not have received the gift of the golden egg. When Huma landed on his bundle of sticks, he snatched the bird in his hands. Huma cried out and begged for freedom; it promised to reward him if he set it free, but the woodcutter was determined to get his payment from the merchant. The bird died on the way to the shop, and the woodcutter realized he had thrown away his chance of a better life by betraying Huma.

Huma came to symbolize not only the legitimacy of rulers but also the elevation of the spirit and an enlightened mind. Just as Huma never touches the ground, some people's minds are not attached to material aspects of the mundane world; they have more heavenly concerns. The Sufi teacher Inayat Khan suggested that the word 'king' was used as a synonym for 'most high,' so the blessing of Huma is not limited to royalty.

In the modern-day world, Huma forms the logo for Iranian Airlines, just as Garuda forms the logo for Indonesian Airlines. It also features in the national emblem of Uzbekistan, representing compassion and love of freedom.

Chapter 19: Simurgh

Origin: PERSIAN FOLKLORE

It had been a long journey in an underground world trying to recover a stolen pomegranate with the power to grant longevity. Melik couldn't believe his brothers had pulled the rope away and left him down the well—he wouldn't have done that to them. Yes, the girl he rescued from the ogre was beautiful, but still, they were his brothers, that should stand for something. He should have listened to her and gone up the rope first, but he hadn't liked the idea of her waiting down here alone.

He had managed to kill the ogre that lived beneath the well and take back the pomegranate it had stolen. Maybe if he had killed the ogre in its sleep, instead of waking it up for a fair fight, he wouldn't be so exhausted now, but it didn't seem right at the time. Now he was desperately lost in the network of caves with no hope of ever seeing the surface again. Not for the first time, Melik wished he had kept the pomegranate instead of sending it up to the surface with the girl.

As Melik collapsed from exhaustion and desperation, he heard the chirp of baby birds nearby. In the strange gloom, he saw a serpent approaching the nest with a vicious glint in its eye. With the last of his strength, Melik drew an arrow and shot the serpent, severing it in two. When the mother bird returned, she saw what he had done and draped her great wings over him until he recovered his strength. Luckily for Melik, he had earned favor with the only healing bird who had the power to travel between worlds; the Simurgh.

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Simurgh is a benevolent bird hybrid reminiscent of a copper-colored peacock with flowing plumage and the head of a dog. Its feet are that of a lion though it only has three claws on each foot. Simurgh is big enough to carry an elephant with ease and strong enough to accommodate passengers. It knows the secrets of fate and can travel to the faraway land of light and the land of darkness in the netherworld. With sharp claws and serrated teeth, Simurgh has the anatomy of a predator but is filled with love for all living creatures.

The earliest accounts of Simurgh describe it as a male bird, often used in Sufi poetry as a symbol of god. In later versions, Simurgh was modeled on a bat, with teeth and the ability to produce milk, thus becoming female. Like Ancient Greece, a bat was thought of as a type of bird in those days. To reconcile the two accounts, Simurgh was given a dog's head and is often called the dog-bird, just as bats once were in Persia.

Although many stories tell of Simurgh nesting in a cave, Simurgh resides in the tree of life, which contains the seeds for all plant life on earth. As Simurgh leaves its perch on the tree, it shakes some seeds free to be dispersed across the land. In Persia, plants were valued for their medicinal properties, so Simurgh is strongly associated with knowledge of healing. In many traditional tales, Simurgh uses this knowledge to

heal people:

When Zal was only a baby, he was abandoned on a mountainside for being albino. His father was terrified of his pale skin and yellow-white hair and was certain this child was actually a demon. Simurgh was flying to her nest up the mountain to feed her young when she saw the baby and took pity on it. She carried it to her nest and raised it with her two offspring as if it were her own child.

When Zal was grown, his father had a dream about him, and full of remorse, he came in search of his son. Simurgh let Zal go with his father but gave him three feathers as a symbol of fortune and protection. If a feather was put into the fire, it would call Simurgh to Zal's side.

Zal used the first feather when his wife was dying during childbirth. Simurgh appeared and explained how to perform a cesarean section. Simurgh applied healing herbs and saved the life of Zal's wife and child. The child was Zal's son, Rostam, who became one of the greatest heroes in Persian folklore.

The second and last time Zal used a feather to summon Simurgh was when Rostam and his famous stallion, Rakhsh, were gravely wounded with arrows. Again, Simurgh used her knowledge of healing and medicinal herbs to remove the arrows and heal their wounds.

In other folktales, Simurgh uses her ability to fly between worlds to take people to the land of light and from the netherworld of darkness. In ancient Persia, both dogs and peacocks were believed to have the abilities of a psychopomp, taking souls between worlds, which helps to explain Simurgh's later hybrid appearance. Of further note regarding Simurgh's hybrid nature is that fruit bats in Iran live in both trees and caves and are linked to seed dispersal when they eat fruit and cast the seeds far and wide.

Simurgh is thought to be an earlier version of Huma in Persian folklore. Like Huma, Simurgh is compassionate and extremely long-lived, renewing itself in flames as it reaches what would otherwise be

the end of its life. With its extensive knowledge of the curative powers of plants, Simurgh symbolizes medicine and healing.

Section Three | Cryptic Canines

The gray wolf was once a common sight across many parts of Eurasia and North America, and dogs have been domesticated for hundreds of years. Because of this long-standing relationship, wolves and dogs are prominent in myth and legend.

Wolves are effective pack hunters, so historically have the reputation of being vicious predators. In ancient myths and legends, canines usually represent death and destruction.

The three-headed dog, Cerberus, is something many people are familiar with and inspired J. K. Rowling's character Fluffy, a terrifying three-headed guard dog. In Greek mythology, Cerberus is the guard dog of the underworld, but his two-headed brother and his guard duties are less familiar. J. K. Rowling's character Fenrir Greyback is also inspired by Norse mythology and werewolf legends.

In Norse mythology, the giant wolf Fenrir plays an important role at the end of the world, and it is wolves that will swallow the Sun and the Moon. While in Egyptian mythology, the wolf-headed god Anubis symbolizes death and judgment.

The werewolf has a well-established place in popular culture and is also portrayed as a lethal predator. But the mythological canine has another side, one we are more familiar with in the domestic dog. Canine mothers are often seen as nurturing and fiercely protective, such as the Roman legend of the wolf who nursed Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome. The Norse god Odin also had two loyal wolf companions, fearless protectors, representing a side of canines more familiar to the modern world.

This section also includes lesser-known canines of myth and folklore, such as the elusive hunter Amarok from Inuit mythology and

the strange and murderous Sigbin from the Philippines.

Chapter 20: Amarok

Origin: Inuit Mythology

She sensed the hunter out on the ice before she saw him. She caught his smell, brought to her by the icy wind, and pricked up her grey ears. A hunter out alone in the long night?—they should know better. She easily lifted her hulking body up and slunk off, her large paws padding

silently on top of the snow's crust. The howling arctic wind whipped any sound of her movement away. The hunter had his back to her,with no inkling of her approach, no warning of what was about to happen. Too easy, thought Amarok. With sharp fangs glistening, she pounced on him, pinning him to the ground in a single agile movement. Her fangs sliced through layers of animal hide clothing and into flesh with ease, and then she shook him like a rag doll, his lifeblood spilling away. As the hunter's spirit left his body, he looked down and realized the elders had been right: Don't go hunting on your own during the night—the Amarok will get you.

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Wolves play a prominent role in Inuit mythology, and there are many tales of Amarok, the mother of wolves, from icy northern areas. Amarok is an Inuit word for wolf, but explorers from the 1800s observed that some communities used this word only to describe a fantastic beast, a giant solitary wolf with very sharp teeth and supernatural strength. It is said to hunt alone and will pick off any hunters who venture out on their own at night, bearing in mind that winter nights in the far North are very long. Just because you are not alone does not mean you are safe:

A man heard there was an amarok nearby and decided to go out looking for it. He was mourning the death of a relative, so he was not in his right mind and was looking for some excitement as a distraction from his grief. Another relative accompanied him, and they set off. They found the amarok's pups, and the mourner suddenly killed them all. Led by his frightened relative, they both ran to hide in a cave. The amarok returned with a caribou in her jaws but couldn't find her pups anywhere. From their hiding place, they saw the amarok run to the lake's edge and start to pull something with a human shape out of the water. Instantly, the mourner's body slumped to the ground, lifeless. His relative fled home, and the amarok let him go. He told everybody what he had seen, that the amarok had pulled the mourner's soul from his body. Nothing can be hidden from an amarok.

But Amarok is not only a cold-blooded killer and is shown in a

different light in some myths:

Once, the sky god Kaila told the people to only hunt healthy, fully grown caribou so that they too would grow healthy and strong. But the caribou herds soon became full of old and weak animals, and there was not enough food to go around to maintain a healthy herd. The people did not want to disobey the sky god Kalia by eating sick or old animals and began to go hungry. Kaliya went to Amarok, the mother of all wolves, and said, “Amarok, you must tell your children, the wolves, to eat the weak, sick and old caribou so that the Sons of the Women can hunt and eat again.” Amarok instructed her children to do this, and from that day forward, wolves preyed upon the slowest members of the herd. Soon the herd grew healthy and strong again, and the people, wolves, and caribou lived in perfect balance. This story was intended to symbolize the interconnectedness of people and animals and that they are all part of the same cycles of life and death.

Many Inuit myths and legends were recorded and translated by the explorer Hinrich Johannes Rink. The story of the orphan boy is told with many variations up and down the coastal areas:

There was once a poor orphan boy called Kagsagsuk. He was not well looked after by his family. They wouldn’t let him into the main room of the house, and he slept in the corridor with the dogs. He was not fed well, so he was very small and weak. Everyone in the village mocked him. One day he prayed for the god of strength to help him, and suddenly Amarok appeared. Amarok knocked him down with her tail, and some small bones fell from his body. Amarok explained that these seal bones had been stopping his growth. She knocked him down again, and a few more pieces of bone came away. Upon Amarok’s request, the boy returned every day to wrestle with her until he grew strong. Amarok told him to keep his new strength a secret until the time was right, and on the way home, even though the villagers mocked him, he ignored them. Then one day, three huge polar bears were seen heading toward the village. Kagsagsuk ran out and killed them with ease, leaving the whole village amazed. Now they all wanted him to come into their

homes and eat with them. He did so, but those who had tormented him in the past came to a gruesome end as Kagsagsuk showed them no mercy.

It is thought that the origin of Amarok is quite likely the giant dire wolf, a species that went extinct at the end of the last ice age. It is possible that the stories of such a huge and fearsome creature have been passed down from generation to generation.

Chapter 21: Fenrir

Origin: Norse Mythology

Fenrir lies motionless as if his giant wolf body has been turned to stone and become part of the earth. The tight bindings around his legs and neck prevent him from moving, and the sword through his muzzle keeps him from making a sound. His piercing eyes are closed, but he senses

the passing of night and day. He has lost track of how long he has been trapped like this, but his agony seems endless. His pointed ears hear everything while he bides his time, waiting for revenge. Fenrir festers, the feelings of betrayal as raw as if it all happened yesterday. He would wreak vengeance on those responsible for this. He will make them pay—he will kill the god Odin.

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Fenrir is a giant wolf from Norse mythology. He is often portrayed as an enormous wolf with a shaggy black coat, rows of sharp fangs, and intense, fiery eyes. His incredible strength and vicious temperament are evident in many paintings of Fenrir. Several surviving carvings and runestones depict Fenrir in the United Kingdom and Sweden, highlighting Fenrir's importance in Norse mythology. He is also described in the Poetic Eddas, particularly in the tale of his binding. Though Fenrir is associated with much ferocious imagery, he was once just a pup.

Fenrir is the son of Loki, the trickster god, and Angrboda, the giantess (meaning "she who bodes anguish"). Loki has three children with Angrboda. Fenrir's siblings are Hel, the girl of life and death, and Jörmungandr, the giant serpent.

One night, the god Odin receives a prophecy foretelling that Loki's three monstrous children will cause a great deal of trouble and disaster. This destruction is inevitable because of the nature of their giant mother combined with the nature of their mischievous and untrustworthy father. Odin sees his own death in Fenrir's jaws—he decides to act to prevent this morbid prediction from coming to pass.

Odin calls for Loki's children to be brought from the land of the giants. He thinks of finding some occupation to keep them out of trouble while also keeping them far away from the gods. Odin sends the giant serpent into the sea and Hel into the underworld to rule over the dead who do not go to Valhalla. That leaves Fenrir, who has grown even on

the journey to Asgard. Odin decides to keep Fenrir among them, thinking that it is too unsafe to send him away, even though he believes Fenrir will cause his death.

As Fenrir grows ever larger and more muscular, only the god Tyr is brave enough to approach him and feed him. Being one of the gods that collected him from the land of the giants when he was a pup, Tyr has no doubt grown fond of him, and Fenrir has not done anybody any harm—yet. Odin knows that even a docile young wolf may grow up to challenge and kill its own parents for dominance in the pack. And Fenrir is no ordinary wolf. The gods become increasingly afraid of Fenrir and know his strength now far surpasses their own.

Considering the ominous prophecy, the gods decide that Fenrir should be tied up to keep him from harming anybody. The first chain they make is not strong enough. They make a game of it with Fenrir, saying it is a chance to test his strength and become famous. Fenrir agrees to be chained up but breaks the chain with such ease that the gods are more afraid than before, though they cheer and clap, congratulating Fenrir on his strength. The gods make a second chain, mighty in size and twice as strong as the first. Fenrir again agrees to be chained up for a chance to prove his strength and gain recognition. After a struggle, Fenrir manages to break the second chain, proudly standing free. Again the gods deviously congratulate him on his strength, but they are now very worried.

Odin decides to commission a binding from the dwarves, known to be the most masterful craftsmen in all of the lands. The dwarves use some special materials to make the binding: the footsteps of a cat, the sinews of a bear, the beard of a woman, the roots of a mountain, the breath of a fish, and the spit of a bird. If any of these are now hard to find, perhaps the dwarves used them all up to make the third binding. When they were finished, the dwarves had produced a long smooth ribbon that was, despite its appearance, unbreakable.

When Odin took it to Fenrir to supposedly test his strength, Fenrir

took one look at it and suspected treachery. What fame would he achieve from breaking a ribbon? The gods taunted him, saying that he was afraid of a ribbon. Fenrir said he would consent to be tied by this ribbon if someone put their hand in his mouth as a show of trust: he would let them go as soon as they untied him if he could not break free from the ribbon. The gods agreed to the oath. They looked at each other; no one was prepared to sacrifice their hand. Then Tyr stepped forward and laid his wrist across Fenrir's teeth, he knew binding Fenrir was going to cost him his hand, and it did.

For this reason, Tyr is known as the god of Law and Justice, and he made a sacrifice for the greater good of his people. However, at the time of Ragnarok, the end of the world, the ground will shake so violently that any bindings will be broken. Fenrir will be free again and seek his revenge.

Chapter 22: Orthrus

Origin: Greek Mythology

Orthrus stretched out in the meadow, his legs flicking in his slumber as he dreamed of chasing a hare. A faint sound in the grass caused Orthrus to snap awake; he sprung to his feet and was instantly alert. Orthrus was guarding the cows, as usual—it had been a quiet night so

far. His two noses sniffed the wind. Something was coming. The cows, unaware, remained asleep, some lying down, some standing, spread out across the pasture. Orthrus turned his two heads in two different directions, listening. Several things were coming. He lowered his body to the ground, waiting. A pack of wolves was closing in on the herd of cattle.

Orthrus crept through the grass, keeping his body low; the wolves hadn't seen him yet. He waited for them to come closer. Then Orthrus pounced on the nearest wolf and ripped it limb from limb with one bite from a set of his mighty jaws. That had drawn the wolves' attention; they began to close in on Orthrus, thinking that, as they greatly outnumbered him, they were safe. The snarling wolves came for Orthrus. At first one, then many at the same time. In a blur of fur and blood spatters, Orthrus tore into the wolves as they tried to attack him. When the gnashing of fangs and shredding of flesh was over, Orthrus alone stood upright, seemingly unhurt, silhouetted against the lightening sky. The bodies of the wolves were strewn about him on the ground, limp and lifeless, as the morning mists began to roll in. He was called the murderous hound for good

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In ancient Greek mythology, two particular beasts spawned many horrifying monsters, including Orthrus the two-headed dog. Orthrus was the firstborn of his parents Echidna and Typhon, each terrifying in their own right. Orthrus' mother, Echidna, was half-woman, half-serpent and his father was the multi-headed man-serpent, Typhon. Their other children included: two dragons; the Hydra, a multi-headed water snake; Chimera, a creature with a lion's head, a goat's body, and tail of a dragon; and Cerberus, the three-headed dog. Some sources include the Sphinx and Nemean Lion as Orthrus' siblings. However, other sources consider these creatures to be Orthrus' or Cerberus' children.

Orthrus, the two-headed dog, is not as well known as his three-headed brother Cerberus, though they are both described as having furious strength, which is not surprising considering their parentage. However, Orthrus does make some appearances in art. For example, a decorated red-figure cup from around 500 BC shows Orthrus with an arrow protruding from his chest and a serpentine tail. Orthrus is sometimes shown with a dog's tail and sometimes with the tail of a

serpent. Usually, he is pierced with arrows in reference to the role he played in the story of Hercules' labors. Orthrus was part of the tenth impossible task Hercules undertook in penance for murders he committed when he had been caused to lose his mind.

On the island of Erytheia, at the edge of the world, the giant Geryon had a beautiful herd of crimson cattle. They shone like the sunset and were healthy and strong. Geryon himself was a huge, powerful man with three heads and three pairs of legs. To protect his prized herd, Geryon the giant employed a cattle herder and his dog. But this dog was no ordinary dog; it had two heads, the tail of a snake, and was unfathomably strong. The dog, Orthrus, kept guard day and night, never tiring, protecting the cattle with the herder, to whom he was very loyal. Geryon the giant admired the dog for his strength and multiple heads, something they both had in common.

One day, a stranger appeared on the horizon. It was Hercules, and he had come to steal the famous red cattle of Geryon the giant. Orthrus smelled the intruder as he approached the grazing lands and went to seek him out. When Orthrus discovered Hercules, he leaped to attack him, but Hercules beat Orthrus back with his club, badly wounding him. As soon as the cattle herder saw the incident, he charged over to help his dog, but Hercules killed him with his arrows. Hercules finished off the injured Orthrus with an arrow as well, leaving the meadow spattered with their blood. Geryon the giant joined the fray to try to stop Hercules from taking his precious cattle, but to no avail: he was also killed by Hercules' arrows. Hercules successfully stole the herd, but his labor was not over—his adventures continued as he struggled to get the crimson cattle of Erytheia home.

The inspiration for Orthrus could have come from the night sky. It is thought possible that the stellar constellations of Canis Major and Canis Minor may have been originally considered as a single canine with two heads, following the constellation of Orion, the hunter. Alternatively, Canis Major may have been considered a two-headed dog in early Greek mythology, which could be the origin of Orthrus' character.

Clearly, the long-standing relationship between people and dogs has captured the imagination of humans since we looked up at the stars for stories to explain the world. And combining the dog with a penchant for super-strength and multiple heads creates a formidable adversary, unless, of course, you are Hercules.

Chapter 23: Sigbin

Origin: Filipino Folklore

It was a warm night marking the beginning of Holy Week. Mosquitoes droned in the shadows where the light from the single oil lamp did not entirely dispel the darkness. It was time. The old woman shuffled across the dirt floor of her hut, her stooped posture showing her age.

Her gnarled hands reached up for one of the clay jars on the shelf, and she carefully lifted it down. She untied the rope with arthritic fingers, removed the cloth, and took out the stopper with slow, precise movements. She set it down in the middle of the floor, muttering to herself. Out climbed the sigbin, expanding to its full size as it escaped the pot. She was almost used to its stench after all these years since she had caught it. Invisible to others but not to her, the old woman appraised its bizarre shape, its dog-like face, long ears, and oversized back legs. Its fiery eyes looked at her briefly before it lumbered out of the hut, off into the darkness. She knew where it would go, sniffing out the children. It needed to feed. Hopefully, it would bring her something back, maybe a heart, and she would make an amulet. She could do with some luck.

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In central Philippines, on the islands in the Visayas region, is the story of the sigbin. Holy Week is one of the most sacred times in the Eastern Orthodox Christian calendar. But while devout believers prepare for their Easter celebrations, something sinister stirs in the forest. Though it is usually invisible to the human eye, the sigbin is said to resemble a dog, goat, or kangaroo with hind legs that are longer than its front legs. It has red eyes and large, hairy ears that flap as it moves along. A sigbin's tail is long and flexible, which it can crack like a whip. Though people cannot often see the sigbin, they might well smell it as it reeks of rotting flesh.

When the sigbin is hungry, it will use its terrible magical powers to drink a person's blood through their shadow or resort to scavenging on the carcasses of deceased forest animals. If livestock has been killed, then a sigbin is often blamed. The sigbin is vampiric by nature, favoring a diet of human flesh, raw off the bone. It is said to prefer children, and even a bite to the ankle can prove fatal. Sigbin will also drink blood, and if it gets desperate, will resort to scavenging: these actions the antithesis of traditional Filipino culture, where food is clean and flavorsome, and behavior is modest. In this way, the sigbin represents the opposite of traditional Filipino values. During the holiest of weeks, you cannot trust shadows, sleep may be dangerous or even fatal, and community harmony is disrupted. The very idea of a sigbin is to upset the natural order of the rural villages and could be seen to represent the darker sides

of life that we try to push aside.

The nocturnal sigbin is said to be kept as a pet or assistant by the Aswang, evil spirits in Filipino folklore, including ghosts, vampires, and shape-shifters, and are the cause of many misfortunes. The sigbin undoubtedly spreads fear among the population. The Aswang dwell in dark and dingy locales, such as forests and cemeteries, an ideal location for their sigbin to lurk. Funerals and wakes in the Philippines are typically brightly lit to ensure that the Aswang won't attend, with their gruesome companions in tow.

There may also be some humans who possess the power to command the sigbin, who keep them in clay jars for safety. Having a sigbin under your control is said to be a symbol of personal good fortune and is viewed as a wealthy person's behavior, but it comes at a cost to others. This characteristic also goes against traditional values, as people see it as selfish and not in keeping with the community spirit.

While the sigbin is a creature of folklore, there may be some scientific truth to the tall tales. In 2003, a potentially new species of fox was reported to have been spotted in nearby Borneo. It was a mammal, presumed carnivorous, with a reddish-brown furry coat, long tail, and cat-like facial features. Scientists set up a camera in the forest, and it captured a photograph of the animal. Could the sigbin possibly be real? Were the sightings based on truth rather than superstition? A long muscular tail is visible in the photo, with shining eyes partially obscured by the forest undergrowth. Its hind legs do appear to be longer than its front legs. Scientists debated the creature's existence, and in 2007, scientists decided that the animal was, in fact, a kind of large flying squirrel that is native to the area. The real sigbin could still originate from an as yet undiscovered species.

Whether the sigbin has its roots in fact or fiction, its ability to scare generation after generation makes it real enough to many who hear its legend. While people sleep with their children close by, their worst nightmare may well be crawling towards them.

Chapter 24: Cerberus

Origin: Greek Mythology

‘Thank the gods that worked’, thought Sybil of Cumae, an audible sigh escaping her lips. She took a breath for what felt like the first time in hours. She could barely bring herself to look at the sleeping monster, but neither could she tear her eyes away. Crumbs of honey cake littered

the floor. She had doubted that the herbs would have been strong enough to sedate such a creature. But there the mighty hellhound lay, all three heads seemingly peacefully asleep. She didn't dare move a muscle. Drool dribbled from his three jaws, seeming to sizzle slightly as it hit the rocks beneath. His muscular body was temporarily relaxed, vicious claws at ease and snake-head tail lying limply on the ground. She summoned the courage to take a step back as silently as possible. Just then, Cerberus began to stir.

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Cerberus the three-headed dog guards the main gates of the underworld for the god Hades who rules there. Often called the Hound of Hades, Cerberus prevents anyone from leaving the underworld, the dead or the living. The living are allowed in, but if they attempt to leave, he will devour them as a tasty morsel. Cerberus was the second born of powerful part-serpent parents Echidna and Typhon. Cerberus' older brother is Orthrus, another murderous multi-headed dog, but with a less well-known occupation. They both have monstrous strength and are renowned for their encounters with Hercules.

Most conceptions of Cerberus describe him with three heads, but earlier writings have sometimes given him 50 or 100 heads as a way to assign him relentless strength. Trying to reconcile these accounts, some scholars say he has three canine heads, and the rest are those of snakes. It is quite common to see Cerberus' tail depicted as a biting snake, which is not implausible considering his parents. In ancient art, Cerberus is usually depicted with three heads or less, thought to be due to logistical reasons. Three heads regained popularity because it links with the idea of symbolizing the past, present, and future.

By all accounts, Cerberus performed his guard duties very well, patrolling the rivers marking the border of the underworld, and monitoring all those, dead or alive, entering its gates. However, there are at least three instances of people getting the better of Cerberus. In one instance, Cerberus is sedated by a drugged honey cake, allowing a living soul to sneak past. In another case, the famous musician Orpheus is

trying to retrieve his beloved from the underworld—she was killed by a snake. In the first time he played or sang since his tragic loss, Orpheus plays his harp-like instrument. The music is so moving and beautiful that even the hell hound is charmed beyond recognition, becoming docile and cooperative, and allows him to pass. The story goes that Orpheus met his beloved in the underworld but could not bring her out, and would have to wait for death to be reunited with her.

The most famous example of Cerberus being overcome involves Hercules. Hercules defeated Cerberus' brother Orthrus during his tenth impossible task given by King Eurystheus. Later, as Hercules' twelfth labor, King Eurystheus commanded Hercules to bring him the Hound of Hades to look upon—and to bring him alive. King Eurystheus asked this not because he wanted to see the beast but because he thought it completely unachievable. He was certain that Hercules would fail. Hercules visited a priest to get some advice about the underworld and its inhabitants. Using this advice, he persuaded Charon, the ferryman, to take him across the river Styx. He then entered the land of the dead. After a difficult journey through the underworld, Hercules asked Hades for his permission to take Cerberus from his guard post. Surprisingly Hades agreed but with conditions. Firstly, Hercules must overcome Cerberus without using any weapons, and secondly, he must promise to bring him back to resume his guard of the underworld. Some accounts say that Hades insisted that Hercules could use no iron weapons, and that is why some paintings show Hercules with a wooden club or rock and holding his lion skin as a shield.

Hercules fought Cerberus, and with his mighty strength, managed to grasp his three heads in a chokehold. Cerberus' snake tail struck him, but he was protected from its venom by the lion hide he wore, acting as a shield. With Cerberus subdued and out of breath, Hercules put him on a chain and led him out of the underworld. Cerberus was so dazzled by the daylight he spewed forth bile which caused plants there to be poisonous. This is why the entrance to the underworld is said to be marked by a profusion of poisonous aconite.

Hercules took Cerberus back to King Eurystheus as requested; everyone they passed on the way was terrified by the three-headed hell hound. King Eurystheus was no exception; he promptly hid in a vat as soon as he saw Cerberus and begged Hercules to take him away. King Eurystheus promised to release Hercules from his labors if he took Cerberus back to where he came from at once. So he did, and Cerberus became one of the very few monstrous creatures to meet Hercules and survive.

Chapter 25: Vrykolakas

Origin: Greek FOLKLORE

The Mother Prioress knew she had been awoken by a noise, but she could not put her finger on what it had been. She warily opened her eyes. The grey light of morning was beginning to creep through the shutters. Her heart was racing, and she could not yet bring herself to move. Without needing to turn her head, she looked for her rosary beads on the bedside table, but they were not there. She remembered the noise that had woken her then: her beads clattering to the stone floor. She began to pray, and as she did so, a hideous cackle echoed throughout the room.

Suddenly, her bedsheets were flung through the air, and she saw a hairy back skitter through the door, the sinister laughter going with it. She did not scream, but her holy words became a shout.

Holding her cross out in front of her and continuing to pray loudly, she ventured through the door. Everything was upended, and holy wine was spilled all over the floor. She followed the sound of running water; for some reason, her shoes were in the cistern. So the rumors were true. She knew who, or rather what, it was; the villagers had been complaining about the same sort of events. She knew a trip to the moneylender's widow was in order. She would have to tell her that when her good-for-nothing-husband died owing everybody money, he became a Vrykolakas. She was sure the Vrykolakas would not stop terrorizing people until his widow had paid his debts with the money he had put away. She would set off as soon as her shoes were dry.

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A Vrykolakas is an undead being of Greek origin with Slavic influences and sometimes characteristics of a werewolf. The Vrykolakas rises from its grave every night, except Saturdays, and haunts its old community. Folklore accounts of their activities range from roaming around, poltergeist-like troublemaking, to suffocating people in their sleep and eating their flesh.

The name has its roots in Slavic words, such as varkolak, meaning 'wolf hair.' Although the etymology is Slavic, brought to Greece via immigration, the concept of the undead has the longest history in Greece, and belief in Vrykolakes was by far the most widespread and pervasive there.

Before the concept of returning from the dead was recorded in Slavic folklore, it was well established in Greek literature. The oldest surviving record of a return from the dead is the story of the unmarried young woman Philinnion from the 2nd Century AD:

The servant ran from the guest bedroom screaming and quickly went to fetch the parents of the household. Their daughter Philinnion had been dead for several months, but the servant explained that she had just seen her sitting on the bed with their visitor, Makhates. By the time they reached the guest bedroom, all that was visible was a pile of women's

clothes, like Philinnion used to wear, a piece of gold jewelry on the table, and entwined bodies under the sheets. The prying party resolved to ask Makhates about it in the morning.

But when morning came, the girl was gone. When Philinnion's mother asked Makhates who had visited him in the night, he said her name was Philinnion and showed her the clothes and jewelry she had left behind. Philinnion's mother recognized them and began to wail and grasp at her hair in grief and confusion. When Philinnion visited the next night, Makhates could not believe that she was undead and remained captivated by her desire for him.

The parents burst in and broke down in tears to see their daughter seemingly alive. However, Philinnion reproached them for interfering with the will of the underworld and, saying they must now grieve again, fell down dead a second time. When Philinnion's tomb was checked, it was empty apart from trinkets given by Makhates during the nightly visitations. Philinnion's body was cremated, and the despondent Makhates killed himself, perhaps hoping to join Philinnion in the underworld.

In remote areas of Greece, people continued to believe in Vrykolakes. They were believed to eat the flesh of the living or otherwise feed off their vital life force. Vrykolakes are said to look like a person or a dog but could take the shape of anything they wished, so accounts rarely agree.

A Vrykolakas would be created when a werewolf was improperly killed, or a person ate contaminated meat that had been killed by a wolf or werewolf. This would lead to the Vrykolakas having hairy palms, enlarged canine teeth, and glowing eyes.

People could also turn into Vrykolakes after death if they had lived a sinful life or were buried in unconsecrated ground. In Ancient Greece, archeological evidence shows bodies weighted down with heavy rocks and millstones to anchor them into their graves and prevent them from

rising from the dead to torment the living.

During the famine in Greece associated with World War II, many people had to be buried in unconsecrated ground as the graveyards overflowed. The belief that the dead would return as Vrykolakes was so strong that many people resorted to decapitating the corpses of their own family members before burial to prevent them from rising from the grave.

The name Vrykolakas implies an early type of werewolf and vampire mix—it is undead and torments the living. They represent a disturbance in the natural order where the dead should remain dead, and nothing good can come from a visit from a Vrykolakas.

Chapter 26: Adlet

Origin: INUIT MYTHOLOGY

The two Tornits sat by the glowing fire, whispering. Stars winked down at them from the clear night sky.

"Why are we afraid of these half-men when they are so much smaller than us?" said the bulky giant.

"Don't be foolish, you saw how they ripped one of their own kind to pieces and ate him. Besides, we are outnumbered. We should escape while they are asleep with full stomachs," the

astute one replied.

"You are probably right. But they are fast runners, what if they catch up with our sled?"

"With only two legs, they are not as fast as a sled. Besides, their dogs are not faster than our dogs. But we must make sure they cannot follow us."

"What do you suggest, brother?"

"You harness our dogs, I will cut their sled lashings."

And with that, the two Tornits quietly crept into action. Just as they were about to set off, one of their dogs barked in excitement, and the half-men woke up. With their tails whipping behind them, they jumped onto their sleds to pursue the Tornits. But while their dogs scattered across the snow, the Adlet were left standing on abandoned sleds, and the two Tornits escaped into the night.

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In ancient Inuit culture, people believed in several different tribes of beings such as the Tornits (giants), Inugandligat (dwarves), and Adlet. The Adlet, or Erqigdlet as they were also known, were a race of dog-men with a human upper body and the two legs and tail of a dog or wolf. Adlets were said to be taller than Inuits but not nearly as tall as the Tornits. Adlets were very swift runners and possessed an aggressive disposition. In some stories, the Adlet are cannibalistic, eating their own kind in addition to being savage and murderous towards other tribes and races.

A confrontation with the Adlet always resulted in a fierce battle, but despite their apparent physical superiority, the Inuit always overcame them. These stories highlight desirable qualities valued in Inuit society, such as physical strength, outsmarting opponents, and teamwork.

The following is a widespread tale of great antiquity with variations found throughout Greenland, Labrador, and Hudson Bay. It is sometimes known as 'The Girl and the Dogs':

Niviarsiang lived with her father, but she refused to marry. Until one day, she married a dog, Ijirqang. Ijirqang was a very unusual dog who was spotted and had an enthralling gaze. Soon, Niviarsiang and Ijirqang had ten children; five were dog pups, and five were Adlet pups with the

top half of a human and the lower half of a dog.

Ijirqang did not hunt, so it fell to Niviarsiang's father, Savirqong, to provide meat for the loud and clamorous family. One day, Savirqong had had enough, and he rowed them all out to a barren island and left them there. He promised he would still hunt for them, and Ijirqang, the unusual dog, could swim across to collect the meat. Each time, Ijirqang would swim back with sealskin sacks filled with meat draped across his body. But Ijirqang came every day wanting more and more meat, for the children had voracious appetites, and his father-in-law eventually tired of this.

One day, instead of meat, Savirqong filled the sealskin sacks with rocks, and Ijirqang drowned before he could reach the island. When Ijirqang's wife, Niviarsiang, found out what had happened, she sought revenge against her father. She sent her ten children to attack him, but they were unsuccessful and returned to the island afraid.

Their mother, Niviarsiang, decided they must be sent away for their own safety. She took off the sole of her shoe and set it upon the water. As she did so, it grew into a boat large enough for five passengers. Niviarsiang sent her five dog pups away in the boat, and she told her five Adlet to flee inland where their grandfather could not find them. Now alone on the barren island, Niviarsiang perished from hunger.

Often a more recent version of this story is presented as an origin story for different peoples because the word adlet or erqigdlet was used by some Inuit communities to describe inland tribes of Native Americans. Additionally, the word for Europeans (qavdlunait) was similar to the term for the dog children (qeydlunait). However, this must be a later adaptation because versions of this story predate Inuit encounters with Europeans. It is more likely that an existing tale was adapted to explain the existence of the European visitors.

The name of the unusual dog, Ijirqang, means 'the powerful eye,' which explains how he conquered Niviarsiang with a glance when she

had refused all other suitors. Some accounts consider Ijirqang to be the personification of the wolf, and qavdlunait can be taken to mean wolf. This would make the Adlet children half-wolf instead of half-dog, which seems a more suitable explanation for their savage reputation.

If the Adlet had canine upper bodies and human legs, they would readily symbolize a fierce predator, but they do not. The Adlet have a human upper body and canine lower body, so instead, they represent a beastly man. Their very nature highlights what makes us human as it strongly points to the Inuit cultural values of working together, being innovative and resourceful, and looking out for each other—and that is why the Inuit always beat the Adlet.

Chapter 27: Kishi

Origin: SOUTH AFRICAN MTHOLOGY

Adelina looked at the gruesome animated skull in front of her and could not believe that it had just asked her to marry it. Of course, she had refused, and now she knocked it away disdainfully. The skull did not fall but floated over to Adelina's sister Sophronia. It offered Sophronia the same proposal, which she graciously accepted, much to Adelina's disgust. But the skull revealed its true form as the god of the sea and took Adelina's sister to rule in great comfort under the waves.

Adelina was far more intrigued by the handsome stranger who next approached her and eagerly accepted his proposal of marriage. The young man beckoned her down a mysterious path, deep into the forest, until finally, they reached an empty hut. As soon as they entered the hut, the handsome stranger revealed his true form, but he was no god. He had two heads, both with dark, hateful eyes and wide sneering jaws, filled with massive sharp teeth, built for crushing bones. Sick to her stomach and mortally afraid, Adelina realized she had pledged herself to a Kishi, and he would never let her leave.

***

Kishi are, at their core, shapeshifters. In the oldest translations of Angolan stories, the Kishi are described as multi-headed ogres but often more accurately described as spirits or demons. In Bantu mythology, which encompasses the Kimbundu of Angola that the Kishi are usually attributed to, man-eating monsters are a common theme, and the Kishi certainly fall under this category.

There were once three young women on the way to visit a tribe of Kishi, who lived in the forest and had recently befriended the girls. One of the girls' younger sisters was determined to tag along and followed the older girls even after they sent her away. The girls did not know that on this visit, the Kishi were planning to eat them during the night.

After sharing the evening meal, the girls went to sleep in their hut, but the little sister stayed awake, feeling uneasy. She was the only one who heard the Kishi at the door when they asked, *'are you all asleep?'*

The younger sister felt that they would all be doomed if she fell asleep, so she sang a response. She sang that they were all in bed but not asleep because they were cold, hungry, thirsty, and mosquitoes were keeping them awake. The Kishi conferred and decided to give more food so the girls would fall asleep and they could eat them. The younger sister accepted the mash they offered and set it aside inside the hut. When the Kishi were gone, she woke the older girls, but they did not believe her. After a while, the Kishi again asked if they were asleep, and again the little sister sang her song. So the Kishi brought bottle gourds

of beer to send them to sleep and blankets to keep the mosquitoes off them. Again, the little sister accepted what the Kishi offered and set them aside. The other girls heard the Kishi whispering and also became uneasy.

While the Kishi were not looking, the girls sneaked out of the hut and hid up a tall tree, so the next time the Kishi asked if they were all asleep, they got no response. The Kishi set fire to the hut, thinking to cook the sleeping girls, but when they looked for the meat in the ashes, they did not find any and started to search the surroundings. Unbeknown to them, a passing eagle had taken the girls home one by one from the top of the tree. The girls' families had no money to repay the eagle, so they said he could help himself to their hens whenever he wanted. So when an eagle takes hens, it is not stealing but a payment for rescuing our ancestors from the Kishi.

In Bantu belief, a person could be born with an evil spirit inside them, leading them to be driven by jealousy and become addicted to a life of crime and violence, like a predatory animal. Over time, the person may learn to change into such an animal and become a Kishi. Although usually able to retake their human form, over time, the Kishi may become permanently transformed into a bloodthirsty animal.

In Bantu mythology and fables, the hyena is often the main adversary because they are considered devious and not to be trusted. Hyenas are also a very fitting animal for the Kishi as they both represent treachery and vulgarity. This concept has been popularized by the novelist Antoine Bandele, giving the Kishi two faces, a ferocious hyena face on the back of a handsome man's head, a truly terrifying prospect.

To trap a Kishi, only the most skilled master of magic can extricate it from its dwelling and confine it to a receptacle such as a horn or leather bag. These trapped Kishi can be worn as amulets to ward off enemies and protect the body from disease. However, the most powerful Kishi can only be enticed if you murder a family member and offer their flesh; thus, the Kishi can tempt you down the path of becoming a

monster yourself.

An Angolan proverb perhaps best sums up the Kishi: appearances are deceitful.

Chapter 28: Psoglav

Origin: slavic folklore

The smell of death was unmistakable, like an undiscovered sheep that had laid down for the last time several days ago. Bojan sat with his back pressed against the wall of the graveyard, metal railings on either side of the brick pillar he was currently behind. His heart was pounding heavily in his chest, and his hands were firmly clamped over his mouth. He was sure he was breathing too loud. Although it was broad daylight, the streets were deserted, and something sinister was going on. There were no birds singing, no children playing. He searched

desperately for a better place to hide. Where was everyone? Bojan's eyes locked onto the thick hedge lining the street on the opposite side of the road, but what if he didn't make it in time?

A moment ago, Bojan had been out for some fresh air, and now he was cowering behind the wall, ever since he saw the creature. It had towered over Mrs. Ryba's freshly filled grave, with its back to him; crumbling earth strewn around its hooves. It had been holding something like a necklace up as if inspecting or admiring it with its grotesque hairy head. Its eyes, he hadn't seen its eyes. Its jaws were what had troubled Bojan the most; opened in a sneer, filled with pointed teeth and dripping with… he couldn't bring himself to think about it; he had known Mrs. Ryba his whole life. Revolted, Bojan heard tearing and crunching inside the graveyard, and he decided he would have to make a run for it. Maybe he could scramble across the road while the monster was eating and get behind the bushes without it seeing him before he too was eaten by a Psoglav. Bojan had an unwelcome thought just as he was about to make his move: what if there are more than one?

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Psoglavs were described as having a dog's head on a human body, and in Serbian Cyrillic, psoglav means 'dog head.' The head of a Psoglav has only one eye, set in the center of its forehead, like a Cyclops. Psoglavs have iron teeth and claws on their human-shaped hands and two long legs ending in horse's hooves. They are closely related to giants, and like them, as well as being much taller than humans, they also prefer to live in caves or other dark places. Their dwellings were said to permit no sunlight but to contain many gemstones, perhaps taken from their victims.

Although they are not harmed by sunlight, Psoglavs prefer to hunt at night in packs. They prey upon people, alive or dead, and even dig out corpses from their graves, ransacking whole villages and graveyards to feast on flesh.

A single Psoglav sounds deadly enough, but one epic Russian poem mentions a whole army of Psoglavs:

The ruling tsarina of Moscow was impatient to get the priceless relics that she so desired: St. John's banner, clothing of an ancient

patriarch, and gold dust from the Serbian city of Smederevo. She asked a visiting Sultan to procure them for her, but he refused as he was unwilling to steal. Before the tsarina even began to search for a less scrupulous individual, General Božo, who volunteered his services on the condition that he could have an army of one hundred thousand Psoglavs. Thinking only of the precious relics, the tsarina agreed. When night fell, General Božo sent forth his army of Psoglavs. They tore across the land like wildfire, and members of the invading Ottoman Army ran for their lives, with the army of young Psoglavs at their heels.

In Eastern Christian Orthodoxy, there were images of Saint Christopher with the head of a dog, and he was often called Psoglavi Svetac, 'the dog-headed Saint.' In the old tradition, it was the Slavic consensus that Saint Christopher was originally a Psoglav called Reprebus, meaning 'scoundrel' or 'reprobate.' Under the rule of the Roman Emperor Diocletian, the Roman Army fought a pack of Psoglavs and managed to capture one, Reprebus. Reprebus was described as a giant with the head of a dog. He was forced to join the Romans and was baptized into Christianity, and later martyred, becoming a Saint.

This version of Saint Christopher's life has been discouraged by the Church, and Moscow prohibited images of Saint Christopher with the head of a dog in the 18th century. It has also been suggested that the depiction of Saint Christopher as dog-headed may have come from a misunderstanding, or likely misreading, of the Latin word Cananeus (the name of an ancient civilization) because it is similar to the Latin word caninus meaning 'canine.'

Slavic iconography seemed to use dog-headed men to represent what they considered to be barbaric outsiders from the edge of civilization. The Slavic nations were subject to foreign invasions, and from their perspective, members of the Ottoman Empire probably did seem to invade from the edge of the world. Attributing animal characteristics to people perceived to be different is a tactic used to dehumanize the enemy and has persisted throughout history.

With palpable predatory similarities to the wolf, such as hunting in packs and a rapacious appetite for flesh, Psoglavs also represent the absence of honor and loyalty.

Chapter 29: Ahuizotl

Origin: AZTEC MYTHOLOGY

The village chieftains looked at the old woman with a mixture of condescension and mild amusement. Instead of growing wise with age, they were sure that she had grown silly. She stood in front of them, dripping water all over the floor, her soaked clothes clinging to her hunched frame, and noticeably out of breath from rushing to their presence. In her arms, she clasped a large jug for carrying water; it was a wonder she could still lift it. Bizarrely it was covered with her petticoat, which she was gripping tightly over the top as if trying to contain jumping frogs.

Fancy appearing in front of the chieftains dripping wet and with no underskirt on.

In response to the chieftains' gestures to proceed, the woman put the jug down on the floor. Glancing anxiously up at them, she retrieved her petticoat and slowly shuffled backward. With a slop of water, out of the jug sprang a creature like a small dog, slick jet black, soaking wet, and its head lowered in a growl. The old woman had been sure the chieftains were going to be pleased with her find, but as they gasped and pointed, clearly they were not. They had seen its small pointy ears and its paws that were like children's hands. It shook itself, spraying water onto everyone, and its hair stood up on end. Now the chieftains were shouting at her and trying to get out of the room. With surprising quickness, the old lady sprang on the wet creature, covering it with her petticoat and stuffing it back into her water jug. As she did so, the creature's long tail flicked back out, grasping the air fruitlessly with the hand on the end of its tail. Whatever the chieftains were expecting the old lady to show them, they weren't expecting an Ahuizotl.

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The detailed knowledge about the appearance and behavior of the Ahuizotl is primarily thanks to one man, Bernardino de Sahagún, the Spanish Friar. Over the fifty years he lived among the Aztecs, he learned the Nahuatl language, interviewed many locals about their beliefs, culture, and history, and extensively wrote about his careful observations. Nestled in Book XI of his famous Florentine Codex, often described as one of the best accounts of a non-Western culture ever written, is a detailed chapter on the Ahuizotl, complete with exquisite illustrations by indigenous artists.

The Ahuizotl is a small dog-type creature that inhabits pools and rivers, residing in an underwater cave. When wet, its black coat is smooth, shiny, and slippery. Out of the water, its hair becomes spiky, hence its name meaning 'spiky water dweller.' Instead of paws, the Ahuizotl has small human-like hands, comparable to a monkey or raccoon, with five fingers and opposable thumbs. It also has a hand on the end of its long prehensile tail, which it uses to drag victims underwater to drown them.

When a victim was dragged underwater, from the water's edge or a boat, the water churned, and white foam lapped the shore. A few days

later, the body would float to the surface minus eyes, teeth, and fingernails that the Ahuizotl was said to have taken from the otherwise uninjured body. Due to its aggressive nature, the Aztec king of the same name took the Ahuizotl as his mascot.

Only an Aztec priest was deemed worthy to touch the body of Ahuizotl's victims because the creature was seen to be doing the bidding of the gods. If the victim had been a good person, people would say that the rain-gods, the Tlalocs, had wanted their company in the terrestrial paradise. If they did not have such a good reputation, people would say that they must have been hoarding precious stones that, representing water, they should have offered to the rain-gods.

If the Ahuizotl had not had any victims for a long time, it used several methods to entice people to the water. Thrashing near its lair would make the fish and frogs come to the surface, tempting the fishermen to come close. It could also cry like a baby, tricking people into coming in search of the lost child.

In Aztec culture, if you heard a strange creature in the night, such as the cry of the Ahuizotl, you should visit the soothsayer as soon as possible. They would encourage people to take heart and face the hardships foretold by such bad omens with courage. Paper, white incense, and gum would be brought, and an offering made to the god of fire, in addition to doing penance.

The Ahuizotl offered an explanation for drowning, and family members took solace from the belief that, flawless reputation or not, the souls of their relatives were now in paradise.

Although Bernardino de Sahagún is often quoted as saying his work was to enable Aztec beliefs to be understood and thereby eliminated, he was under pressure from suspicious Spanish authorities to justify his work. The same Spanish authorities later confiscated his life's work and prohibited him from continuing, although he discretely did despite the ban. While people in Spain and England doubted whether the Aztecs

had souls or were even human, Bernardino de Sahagún was conversing with them in their own language and trying to understand their worldview, including their mythical creatures.

Thanks to one man’s appreciation of humanity, in all of its different forms, we know that the Ahuizotl was feared and respected as a friend of the rain-gods, doing their bidding to bring people to paradise.

Section Four | The Eternal Hiss

The fastest-acting snake venom can kill you in less than half an hour, so no wonder some of the most terrifying monsters from myth and folklore are serpents.

Serpents feature in myth and folklore from almost every culture. For a creature that has been around since the dinosaurs, there is a very diverse range of snakes, represented by their symbolism. Some serpents are considered wise and knowledgeable, whereas others represent death and destruction. They can also symbolize healing, transformation, and rebirth due to their ability to shed their skin. Snakes that live in the ground are seen as a link between the world of the living and the underworld, like the Nidhöggr in Norse mythology.

In mythology from coastal communities, sea serpents are often featured, like Bakunawa in the Philippines and Jörmungandr from Norse mythology, both inhabiting the depths of the sea. A common theme across mythologies is a storm god battling a sea serpent, symbolizing the struggle against chaos. You will find examples of this popular theme from Norse, Greek, and Japanese mythology in this section.

Greek mythology has given us some of the most famous serpents. The Hydra, a multi-headed regenerating serpent; and in this part of the book, you will meet her mother, Echidna. Many have heard of Medusa from Greek mythology, but she also had two immortal sisters who are less renowned. In this section, lesser-known serpents and serpent-hybrids are discussed.

Mythological serpents are often portrayed as multi-headed, multi-tailed, or of gargantuan size to make them a truly formidable adversary. The famous Basilisk, the serpent king from European legend, could also turn people to stone, like Medusa, yet another reminder that serpents can

bring a swift end to mortal life.

Chapter 30: Typhon

Origin: Greek Mythology

Hera was furious. As the goddess of marriage and childbirth, how had her husband, Zeus, dared to have a child without her? On his own! The indignity. And he thinks himself fit to rule

the gods. What an insult. Hera swore she would get revenge. Seething, she set out to bring a child into the world that would be able to challenge Zeus. Insurmountable strength would be required, and she knew just who to ask. She appealed to Gaia and Tartarus, to produce a child: a monster god. Hera waited, thinking how sweet it would be to see Zeus brought down from the throne. When the time was right, she watched the cave entrance, ready to meet her creation. A single serpent began to emerge from the cave. Hera felt a twinge of disappointment: granted, it was a giant snake, but not enough to kill a god. Interrupting her thought, another serpent came through the cave entrance, followed by a man's torso joined to the serpent coils at powerful thighs. The son of Gaia had one hundred heads emanating from his shoulders, and his eyes burned like fire. He unfolded his mighty black wings as he came out into the light, every inch of him looking venomous. 'Perfect,' whispered Hera, feeling as proud as if he were her own son. "He is Typhon," said Tartarus. "May he kill all the gods in Olympus."

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One of the most deadly creatures in Greek mythology, Typhon is a monster but also a god. He is the youngest son of Gaia, the Earth, and Tartarus, the primordial God of the deep underbelly beneath the foundations of Earth. Typhon may have originally started out as a wind god, summoning typhoons, although this was a separate god in very early Greek mythology. The serpentine Typhon is described as being as tall as the stars, with viper tails in the place of legs. He has one hundred snake-like heads that emit sounds of many different animals, such as bulls, lions, boars, wolves, and bears, surrounding him in a cacophony of horrible noise. His red eyes are fiery and unnerving in themselves. He has vast dragon-like wings and spits plumes of fire. Poison exudes from every hair on his body, as well as his viper fangs. He is so strong that even the gods of Olympus feared him, which is precisely what the goddess Hera had intended when orchestrating his creation. Typhon's mother Gaia had an earlier brood of children, the Giants, who were destroyed by Zeus. Gaia nursed a grudge against the gods of Olympus and raised her son Typhon accordingly; cruel, uncontrollable, and one who believed the throne was rightfully his and the rule of the Titans needed to continue.

Typhon is most known for this association with Echidna, who was

half serpent, like himself. They birthed some of Greek mythology's most dangerous monsters including Orthrus and Cerberus, the multi-headed dogs with serpent tails, the Hydra, a multi-headed serpent that grew two heads if one was cut off, the Chimera, a creature that had the heads of a lion, a goat and snake; and even the Sphinx, the famous beast that would kill all those that could not answer her riddles. The list of their offspring continues with Ladon, the serpent like dragon that protects the golden apples in the Garden of Hesperides, the Nemean lion of the infamous Hercules' twelve labours, and the Gorgon Sisters, of whom Medusa was the most well known.

In the stories, a time came for Typhon to challenge Zeus and attempt to take over his rule. Typhon launched an attack on Mount Olympus in the middle of the night, throwing blazing rocks through the darkness, assailing the home of the gods. Most of the gods knew they were no match for Typhon and transformed themselves into animals so they could run away and hide. Even Hercules turned into a fawn and fled with the others to Egypt. Only Zeus and his daughter Athena (the same daughter he had birthed without his wife Hera) remained. Zeus had already beaten Gaia's other children, the Giants, and with encouragement, or some say goading, from Athena, he remained to answer Typhon's challenge.

Seeking revenge and power, Typhon threw more fiery rocks at Zeus, and as fire spurted from his mouth, lighting up the sky, he lay waste the land thereabouts. Zeus fought back with his famous thunderbolts.

When Zeus caught up with him, he struck Typhon with an adamantine sickle and injured him. Although Typhon was wounded, he managed to wind his snake coils around Zeus and get the sickle from him. With the sickle, Typhon cut out the sinews from Zeus' hands and feet and took him prisoner. He kept Zeus in a cave, with his sinews hidden in a bearskin, both guarded by a serpent. Seeing what had happened, Athena sought out Zeus' son Hermes, who also fled to Egypt with the rest of the gods. It was Hermes who returned and rescued Zeus to reunite him with his sinews.

In some stories, Typhon then spent years torturing Zeus. It was Hermes' bravery which helped free Zeus from the clutches of Typhon, whose only purpose was to end the reign of the Olympians. A battle continued for ten thousand years with the uniting of all the Gods to end Typhon's tyranny. In the midst, hundreds of cities were burnt to the ground.

Zeus eventually defeats Typhon and manages to hurl him into the abyss, and the earth shudders in response. Finally, Zeus puts a mountain on top of the abyss to prevent Typhon from escaping.The mountain under which Typhon is trapped is known as Mount Etna, and any earthquake or volcanic activity today is attributed to Typhon trying to break free from his eternal prison.

The father of monsters is crucial to Greek myth, not only because he was feared by all the Gods, but also because his death marked the end of the battle between the Titans and the Olympians. Typhon was an example of a monster in the truest sense. A monster with one purpose - to end the reign of the Olympians. The destruction that came with that sole aim was of no consequence to him. With no redeeming quality, Typhon is often considered the epitome of pure evil.

Chapter 31: Fafnir

Origin: Norse Mythology

Hidden in the Scandinavian wilderness, the ill-tempered dragon was brooding in his lair with only one thing on his mind—guarding his gold. Clambering over his haul, checking each item, he remembers the heavy price he paid to seize it. He will do anything to keep it. Anything.

He is isolated from his family and has abandoned his friends, but what are they when compared to his treasures? Fafnir strikes fear into the hearts of the nearby villagers and poisons the land with his toxic breath to scare anyone away that might come too close to his lair. Little does Fafnir know, his gold carries a curse, and the family that he betrayed to get it may well be plotting against him to get it back. Warriors may attempt to steal the gold, but while the curse remains, Fafnir's treasure will continue to bring misery to those who try to acquire it.

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As far back as the Pagan times of Europe, the legend of Fafnir was told across the frigid northern seas from Iceland to Norway to Sweden. The warnings of this Germanic legend were sung on the wind, telling a tale of greed, murder, betrayal, and a deadly curse.

Originally, Fafnir was one of the three royal dwarf brothers, along with Otr and Regin, all sons of Hreidmar, the Dwarf King. Reign was a skilled craftsman and Otr a hunter, with the likeness of an otter during the day. Otr would catch salmon in the rivers for his family to eat. One day, the god Loki saw the otter and, not realizing his true identity, killed Otr. Loki and Odin took the otter skin to the Dwarf King's home to celebrate their catch. King Hreidmar recognized his deceased son and demanded payment for their mistake; they must stuff the otter's skin with gold. Loki dashed away, stuffing the otter skin with gold stolen from another dwarf, Andvari. Andvari the dwarf cursed his gold with a magic ring as Loki stole it: anyone who tried to possess the gold would be destroyed.

Upon receiving this doomed payment from Loki, King Hreidmar was soon murdered by Fafnir, his own son, who was so overcome with greed the moment he saw the gold. Fafnir took the golden treasure and fled through the forests to the mountains, where he hid, growing more greedy and suspicious every day. He turned himself into a dragon in order to better protect his treasure from outsiders. Fafnir exhaled his poisonous breath to keep any would-be thieves away, and for a while, it was successful.

But the lure of the treasure was too strong for some to resist. Fafnir's younger brother Regin had not forgotten the golden loot and was plotting to steal it for himself. Regin persuaded his foster-son Sigurd to murder Fafnir by stabbing him through the heart. Regin suggested that they could steal the dragon's treasure and share it between themselves.

Together, Regin and Sigurd forged a new sword, specially for their mission. The blade was named Gram and could slice through Regin's shield adorned with Fafnir's image. The two men were ready to fight their enemy.

As Regin retreated, Sigurd lay in a ditch waiting for Fafnir. Sigurd thrust his sword into Fafnir's chest, giving him a mortal wound. As Fafnir lay dying, he warned Sigurd of the curse and foretold that Regin would try to murder him too. Sigurd cut out Fafnir's heart, roasted it over a fire, and ate it. Upon tasting Fafnir's blood, Sigurd could suddenly understand the chattering birds nearby, and Fafnir's warning had proven true. Regin had been corrupted by the cursed gold and was planning to murder Sigurd. But, Sigurd killed Regin first and took Fafnir's treasure for himself.

The curse of the treasure indeed continued, as Sigurd himself also met a murderous end after yet more betrayals from family and first loves. Depending on the legend, the ending may differ. Some say that Andvari was eventually reunited with his gold after it was left in a cave to break the curse. Others say that it was sunk to the bottom of the river Rhine, where it remains for no one to possess, ensuring the curse cannot be passed onto anyone else.

Fafnir's story is also featured on an elaborate carving in the historic Hylestad Stave Church in Norway, which now resides in the Museum of Cultural History in Oslo. The wooden carvings date back to the late 12th Century and show in great detail how Fafnir was killed, and the curse continued. Fafnir appears in the 11th Century runic rock carving in Sweden, known as the Ramsund Carving or the Sigurd Carving. This large carving illustrates Fafnir's execution at the sword of Sigurd. The

carving still stands to this day.

By this point, these stories must sound all too familiar. Well the legend of Fafnir is such an affecting story that it has inspired recent tales in modern culture. Fafnir is said to be the inspiration behind J. R. R. Tolkien’s character of Smaug, as well as appearing in the Richard Wagner opera Der Ring des Nibelungen, and the novel Day Watch by Sergei Lukyanenko.

However the legend inspires us, the story of Fafnir serves as a cautionary tale about the perils of hoarding wealth and how obsession and greed can bring catastrophe to families and relationships.

Chapter 32: The Gorgon Sisters

Origin: Greek Mythology

Stheno sat with her back against the rocky wall outside the cave, her golden wings folded behind her. She was incensed, as usual, but had grown tired of pacing up and down. Now her rage simply simmered; a constant companion. She leaned her head back against the rocky wall

and closed her eyes. She thought of her little sister, remembering how she used to be, with long golden hair, an innocent smile, and bright inquiring eyes. As a young child, Medusa had skipped everywhere. But as she came of age, her beauty had been her downfall. Desired by men; coveted by gods—Medusa had been cursed, and it was entirely their fault. The gods were no better than mortal men; she could happily kill them all. And now that Medusa could kill with one look, both her sisters Stheno and Euryale grew envious of her.

***

Greek mythology tells of three frightful sisters that are so horrifying in appearance that to look at any of them will turn you to stone. They are called the Gorgons, meaning grim and dreadful. The eldest is Stheno, the forceful and mighty. She is known to be ferocious and independent. Euryale of the wide sea, the far-roaming. She is known for her bellowing cries that can turn stone to sand. These two eldest sisters are immortal; whereas, Medusa, the guardian, is the youngest, and she is mortal. All three are powerful and vicious, born of the sea gods Phorcys and Ceto, though some claim they are the daughters of Typhon and Echidna.

In ancient Greek art, the Gorgons are often depicted as having broad, round faces, wings, and faces framed by snakes. They are shown with bulging staring eyes, and their wide mouths have teeth like the tusks of wild boar. They are described as being hideously ugly. These images were often used as symbols of protection, like gargoyles, on buildings. In Greek mythology, this is how the Gorgons first appeared, as protectors of oracles as far back as 6000 BC. Their appearance and purpose changed over the years and it was in Homer's *Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, where the Gorgons began to get written into literature. Even then Homer mentions the idea of a single Gorgon and not three sisters. It wasn't until the 7th century BC, where Hesiod first mentions the existence of three Gorgons, sisters and daughters to Phorcys and Ceto. Hesiod is the first to mention the three sisters by name. It was the Greek poets that came after Hesiod that began to mention the Gorgon sisters as both beautiful and terrifying, and who gave Medusa the power to turn all

men into stone with one glance.

It is important to note that one of Medusa's most popular stories involving Poseidon and Athena, was actually penned by Ovid, in his popular literary work *Metamorphoses.* This most popular tale of Medusa as a victim of the Gods was also a means for the Roman Ovid to express his disdain for the Greek Gods in a fashion dramatized far beyond any of his Greek counterparts. In Ovid's tale of Medusa, before she became a monster, she was a beautiful woman and a priestess in the temple of Athena and had therefore taken a vow of celibacy. Medusa's long golden hair shone in the sun, and many who saw her desired her. Her looks caught the attention of Poseidon, god of the sea. Poseidon violated Medusa in Athena's shrine. Following this event, the goddess Athena punished Medusa, finding no fault with Poseidon. Athena cursed Medusa as a punishment for defiling her shrine. She rid Medusa of her beauty, enraged that she had broken her vow of celibacy, whether it was with or without consent.

Medusa fled to her immortal sisters Stheno and Euryale, where they lived in a cave near the sea. Cast about the surroundings were remains of both man and beast that had been turned to stone. As time passed, Medusa seethed and festered until her appearance became more and more monstrous.

Meanwhile, on the island of Seriphos, another man in a position of power was planning to obtain a woman he desired. King Polydectes wanted to get young Perseus off the island and out of the way because he was trying to pursue his mother. The King asked Perseus to bring him the head of the mortal Gorgon, Medusa, as a gift. The gods knew that King Polydectes' actions were not honorable, and for this reason, they helped Perseus, giving him magical objects to help him in his quest. The gods gave Perseus a blade, a sack, and a helmet. Hermes, the god of travel, gave his famous winged shoes, and Athena herself gave Perseus a mirrored shield.

Now well equipped, Perseus crept up to the cave in the dead of

night. He looked around, using only the reflections in his shiny shield to guide him. All of the sisters were asleep. Medusa was sleeping so deeply that even the snakes emanating from her scalp were motionless. Perseus killed her as she slept, hacking her head off with a forceful blow from his sword. Medusa was pregnant to Poseidon, and as the blood gushed forth from her severed neck, so with it came two children. They were Pegasus, the winged horse, and Chrysaor, the giant.

Upon hearing the commotion, Medusa's sisters awoke. Euryale, in particular, let out an anguished cry, so horrible it began to crumble the stones about them. Both sisters were determined to kill Perseus and chased him as best they could. They lost track of him because the gods had given him the helmet of Hades to wear, which causes immense darkness, rendering him invisible. As well as this, he was wearing Hermes' winged shoes, giving him the ability to fly to escape their clutches.

When Perseus returned to the island of Seriphos with the head of Medusa in a bag, he discovered that his mother had been forced to marry King Polydectes against her will while he was away. Perseus went before the King, who asked if he had brought the Gorgon's head. With his face turned away, Perseus lifted Medusa's severed head from the sack and held it aloft. The whole court was turned to stone, and his mother thus freed from her forced marriage by her death. Following this, Perseus returned the borrowed objects to the gods and gave Medusa's head to the goddess Athena. Athena duly mounted it onto her breastplate to petrify her enemies. Turned from beautiful to deadly, this is how Medusa and her Gorgon sisters have come to symbolize protection from dangerous threats.

Chapter 33: Lamia

Origin: Greek Mythology

Glancing anxiously around the courtyard, the mother called out: 'Get in this house right now, or she will come and she will get you!' Her voice came out angrier than she felt, the tension in her chest belaying her concern. Nearby, a large serpent humanoid laughed to herself

as she heard the mother's chide. In response to the mother's call, the creature listened to a rush of small footsteps running under the stone arch across the street. 'Yes, I will get you', she thought to herself with self-satisfaction. It was so long ago when Lamia had children of her own. Now, she only remembered that they were the cause of her devastating pain. No woman should have children—she would rid mothers of their burden. The evening was turning into night, and the colors of the day gradually faded to gray. Lamia emerged from behind the stone wall and licked her lips. She relished what was coming: it was her time to hunt.

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Even in modern-day Greece, Lamia is a familiar character. She is referred to like a bogey monster to frighten children into doing as they are told. There is even a saying to describe the sudden death of a young child, which translates to 'strangled by Lamia.' In earlier times, parents feared Lamia so much that they gave their children amulets to wear to protect them from her. But before Lamia started devouring children in the night, there is a tale of beauty, jealousy, suffering, and madness.

The King of Libya had a mortal child named Lamia, although some sources say that Lamia was the daughter of Poseidon the sea god. Lamia grew into a beautiful young woman, enchanting to behold, and a queen of Libya. Zeus, from his home on Mount Olympus, saw her enthralling beauty and was captivated by desire. Lamia became one of his many affairs, much to his wife Hera's displeasure. When she found out about yet another infidelity, Hera was overcome by jealous rage and sought vengeance.

By then, Zeus and Lamia had several children together; Hera was filled with resentment and punished Lamia severely. Hera endeavored to make all of Zeus' mistresses suffer, but Lamia received the worst treatment. She tricked Lamia into murdering her own children, in some Greek tales they even mention the idea that Lamia was cheated into eating her own offspring, which is where the idea of her being a child-eating monster stems from. Hera then cursed Lamia with insomnia so she would not even be able to see the children she had adored in her

dreams. Lamia was plagued by visions of what had happened yet could find no respite in sleep. Driven mad by what Hera had put her through, she gouged out her own eyes. In some accounts, it was Zeus who took pity on Lamia and gave her the ability to remove her eyes at will so that she could find some relief from her unbearable torment.

In one account, a child of Zeus and Lamia is described, Herophile, who somehow survived this violent past well into adulthood and became a famous oracle. It is thought that Hera took her away from Lamia and that she was raised elsewhere, though she was presumed dead by her mother. Another child surviving in this way was Acheilus, a handsome yet conceited mortal boy. He challenged the goddess of love and beauty, Aphrodite, to a contest because he was sure he was more beautiful than her. Aphrodite was outraged by his arrogance, and instead of taking part in the contest, she turned him into a shark-like sea monster.

Lamia could find no escape from her grief, and her insanity worsened. She began to steal and consume other people's children so others would know her heartache. Lamia could not bear to see other mothers happily surrounded by their children—something she had been so cruelly deprived of. The more children she murdered, the more grotesque Lamia's appearance became. She began to transform into a serpentine monster as a combination of the result of her horrific actions and Hera's curse. Due to her monstrous nature, Lamia is often portrayed with the lower body of a snake. Famous painters of Lamia hint at this, such as Herbert James Draper, who depicts Lamia admiring a snake on her forearm while she is wearing a shed snakeskin draped around her human hips.

As time went on, Lamia's story morphed to include a race of nocturnal demons called Lamiae. They were partly serpent, each with the torso and head of a beautiful woman and the lower body and tail of a snake. Instead of preying on children, they seduced young men for their blood; thus, they are considered an ancient version of vampires. Although the story is different, it represents the same themes of desire and subsequent devastation. It is this idea of a serpentine seductress that

John Keats used in his famous poem about Lamia, where he developed the concept of dangerous beauty and gratuitous hedonism.

In addition to Zeus' lust and Hera's jealousy, the story of Lamia represents the fear people have for their children's safety and that something so irreplaceably precious can be taken away. It also serves as a cautionary tale for parents to keep a watchful eye on their children. Not only did Lamia provide a way of explaining sudden infant death, but she also personifies an anxiety no doubt as old as parenthood itself.

As Hera's curse was an eternal one, Lamia may still roam the lands at night, hunting for children.

Chapter 34: Yamata no Orochi

Origin: Japanese Mythology

Ashinazuchi sat on the grassy banks of the river. His reflection rippled on the surface of the water; he was an old man now. What am I going to do? he thought. He looked over to his wife

and daughters, huddled together by the house, and a soft sob escaped him. He felt helpless against the impending slaughter, just as he had been last year. Soon the earth would rumble, the birds would quiet, and the sun would be blotted out by an enormous serpent-like form. He knew the creature would appear over the horizon to consume another sacrifice, and that sacrifice would be one of his daughters.

Sure enough, the earth shook, and an eerie silence fell; he watched in horror as an eight-headed serpent appeared in the distance. It soared over the mountains heading slowly but surely for the village. Numb with fear and sickened with dread, Ashinazuchi heard his neighbors shouting in alarm as panic gripped the village. Ashinazuchi sat motionless as he saw the many heads sniffing the air in different directions, hunting for his next victim. The beast was enormous and looming ever larger as it approached, already casting a shadow over the whole valley and blocking out the sun. He heard the fear and despair in the cries of his family, and he felt ashamed anew of his powerlessness. He prayed for a miracle, some divine intervention, to save his daughter before it was too late. He knew there was nothing else he could do against the Yamata no Orochi.

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The Yamata no Orochi is a giant legendary serpent, described in ancient Japanese texts known as the Kojiki dating back to 680 AD. It was said to have eight heads and eight tails and to have been so large that its body spanned eight hills and eight valleys. It had red eyes and a belly that was smeared with the blood of others. On its back grew forests of firs, winter cherry, club moss, Japanese cypress, and Japanese cedars.

In the famous story, Ashinazuchi and his wife Tenazuchi had seven daughters. Yamata no Orochi came every year demanding a sacrifice and devoured one of their beloved daughters until only the youngest, Kushinadahime, was left. Ashinazuchi had no hope of defeating such a beast by himself and, so far, his prayers had been unanswered.

On the day Yamata no Orochi came for Ashinazuchi’s last remaining daughter, the storm god Susanoo had been expelled from the heavens for tricking his sister Amaterasu, who was the goddess of the sun. Walking by the river, Susanoo spotted some chopsticks floating in

the water and realized that people must live further upstream. So he followed the river and found Ashinazuchi, with his wife and daughter, crying. Susanoo was moved by their plight and was determined to help the grief-stricken family.

Susanoo transformed Kushinadahime into a comb and put her in his hair to keep her safe from Yamata no Orochi. He then instructed Ashinazuchi and Tenazuchi to build a fence around their homestead with eight gates. At each gate, they placed a large vat of strong home-brewed sake. Then, they waited.

Just as Ashinazuchi had said, Yamata no Orochi was soon seen making its way to take Kushinadahime. Everyone hid out of sight and waited to see how the plan would unfold. As Susanoo had predicted, the monster could not resist the sake. It stuck one of its heads into each of the eight vats and drank greedily. The deadly serpent had not realized how strong the sake was; soon, he was drunkenly asleep on the ground.

Susanoo crept out from his hiding place with his sword drawn. He brought down his blade and killed the beast, chopping it into small pieces until the Hikawa River ran red with the serpent's blood. After mincing the dragon down to its fourth tail, Susanoo's sword broke as it bore down on something solid that glinted in the sun. It was the legendary sword Kusanagi no Tsurugi which represents valor and virtue. Susanoo later presented the sword to his sister to make amends for their argument, and after their reconciliation, he was permitted to enter back into the heavens.

With Yamata no Orochi destroyed and his familial rift repaired, Susanoo transformed Kushinadahime back into her human form, and they were married. Then, Susanoo traveled around the Izumo region of Japan to find the perfect place to build his palace. When he found the ideal place in Suga, Susanoo was so moved that he recited a poem on the spot and began building his palace. When Susanoo and Kushinadahime's home was complete, they appointed Ashinazuchi as caretaker so the family could remain together free from the threat of

Yamata no Orochi.

In present-day Japan, at the Suga Shrine, Susanoo’s first poem has been carved onto a rock for all to read, immortalizing the hero who killed Yamata no Orochi. According to legend, Susanoo’s poem is the origin of Japanese haiku poetry.

The blade found inside Yamata no Orochi’s body, Kusanagi no Tsurugi, is one of the three Imperial Regalia of Japan. The sword was passed down from Amaterasu, the sun goddess, through the royal lineage and is rumored to remain at the Atsuta Shrine in Nagoya.

Susanoo’s victory over Yamata no Orochi emphasizes the importance of bravery, virtue, and helping those in need. The valiant hero also shows us the necessity of building bridges after arguments, taking care of our family, and succeeding together. One final lesson from the legend of Susanoo and Yamata no Orochi is that art can spring from adversity, bringing beauty for centuries to follow.

Chapter 35: Bakunawa

Origin: Filipino Mythology

‘Quick, it’s starting Amado,’ called Datu to his grandson. ‘See how a bit of the moon is already missing?’ Amado looked up to the shining orb that was full a moment ago; sure enough, it did look as though a bite had been taken out of it. ‘Some of it has already been eaten!’ Amado

shouted aghast. Amado's grandmother bustled over with the pots and pans, 'Here, make as much noise as you can to scare the creature away,' she told Amado, handing him a pan and a wooden spoon. He and his grandfather stomped around the garden, banging their pans and shouting, 'Return our moon!' Amado's grandmother smiled as she watched them fondly. The commotion brought Amado's mother to the door, silhouetted by the light behind her. 'What a noise. Are you filling his head with stories again, Dad?' Amado's mother asked, her tone of voice making it clear to her parents that she didn't quite approve. 'Not stories, Mama, look! It worked!' replied Amado, delighted, 'Bakunawa didn't eat the moon—we made her spit it back out!'

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Well-known throughout the Philippines is Bakunawa, the moon-eating dragon whose stories have been passed down through the generations by a rich oral tradition. The name is a compound word from 'curved' and 'snake.' Large reptiles are not uncommon in the Philippines, including monitor lizards and giant crocodiles, so it is a fitting mythological creature for this part of the world.

The story of Bakunawa is thought to have been influenced by tales of the Hindu god Rahu who turned into a demon. Rahu is often depicted as half-serpent and is said to cause eclipses by eating the sun or moon. In ancient times, Hindu mythology spread throughout South East Asia as people migrated along trade routes. Over time, these stories have been incorporated into Filipino mythology, enriching the character of Bakunawa.

Bakunawa is described as being a vast winged sea-serpent who can fly as well as swim. Her other physical features include a long serpent-like body, enormous jaws as wide as a lake, a red tongue, gills, and whiskers.

There are many different variations of the myth depending on which part of the archipelago the story is from. However, an essential common thread is the existence of seven moons. These are often attributed to the days of the week, but this is likely a convenient simplification. In an

ancient calendar from the area, seven lunar months correspond to agricultural work in the fields, with a different task being completed starting at each new moon. The seven moons of these seven lunar months have different names and represent various deities. Apart from the preceding moon marking the start of the seven significant moons, the other moons of the year are unnamed because they hold no agricultural significance. This makes it much more plausible that a different moon has its turn to shine each month. That is until Bakunawa succumbed to her weaknesses.

Once, the supreme god Bathala created seven moons; they were magnificent, and the people loved them and the light they gave. The beauty and light of the moons was Bathala's gift to the people. One of the moon deities was called Bulan. He was handsome, with luminous skin, gleaming dark hair, and deep brown eyes. One night he came down from the sky to swim in the sea. He was so striking that even the usually vicious mermaids were enamored and swam playfully with him.

But someone else had been admiring the moons, especially the handsome deity Bulan. Bakunawa, the sea goddess, was trying to catch Bulan's eye. Bulan didn't notice her, but Bakunawa was convinced that he had been unmoved by her beauty and ignored her. She thought he was only interested in the mermaids; Bakuanwa felt slighted. Her desire turned to envy and greed: if she couldn't have this moon, no one could. She turned herself into a monster to bite him right out of the sky. Sure enough, when Bulan returned to the sky, Bakunawa left the sea and flew upwards, a towering, threatening figure. She ate the moon whole, but she was not satisfied for long. In the coming months, she rose into the sky and consumed the moons one by one until six of the seven moons had been devoured.

The people were growing increasingly desperate and did not want to lose the beauty and light of the last moon in existence. They appealed to the god Bathala, who planted bamboo on the moon so Bakunawa would not be able to swallow it in one go. The craters one can see on the surface of the moon today, are said to be the result of the bamboo

Bathala planted. Bathala told the people what to do the next time the moon was under threat.

When the people saw the last moon starting to be eaten, they ran outside and made as much noise as possible to scare Bakunawa away. Some villages used loud drumming, some banged pots and pans, and others made beautiful soothing music to distract Bakunawa and send her to sleep.

Thus, Bakunawa was deterred from eating the last moon; she returned to the depths of the sea, where she guards the rift in the seafloor that is the opening to the underworld.

The story of Bakunawa is an example of mythology being used to explain natural phenomena, such as lunar eclipses. Her story reminds us that unchecked desires can turn ugly and that we should protect things that are important to us. Images of Bakunawa are used to symbolize determination, strength of will, and resilience, as whatever it takes, every so often, Bakunawa will try again to consume the last moon.

Chapter 36: Echidna

Origin: Greek Mythology

The traveler followed the hoof prints of his missing horses. The morning was too cold for such a miserable task. His horses wouldn't have wandered off in the night—they must have been stolen. It was hard to track them over the rocky terrain, but every so often, he found a recent

hoof mark on the frosty ground. Why hadn't he heard anything in the night? Something didn't add up. After following the tracks for a time, he came across a large cluster of boulders; he noticed an opening in the ground between them. The trail of hoof prints disappeared, and he looked around, perplexed. Suddenly, a movement caught his eye: from out of the hole began to emerge a beautiful woman. Her glossy hair cascaded over her shoulders, her skin was smooth and fair, and her eyes were dark and enticing. He lost track of what he was doing there for a moment—he shook himself out of it—'Have you seen any horses?' he asked. He was waiting for the rest of this lovely creature to emerge from the boulders; he didn't wholly disapprove of the way she was looking at him. It made him forget to question what she was doing out here in the middle of nowhere. As she emerged, however, instead of legs, she had the body of a snake. An echidna! he thought, shocked but equally mesmerized. 'Horses? Yes, I've seen them. Come inside, and I'll tell you about them,' she replied in a voice that could not be disobeyed.

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The earliest descriptions of Echidna tell of the torso and head of a beautiful young nymph who never grows old, with the lower body of a colossal viper. She had black eyes set in a fair face and long flowing hair. Venomous and fierce, Echidna had a voracious thirst for blood and, as a flesh-eating monster, could destroy mortals with ease. Echidna lived beneath the earth in a cave and preyed upon unsuspecting passersby, carrying them off and devouring them.

In the natural world, echidnas are named after Echidna in Greek mythology because they both have mammalian and reptilian features.

Echidna is said to symbolize the negative watery aspects of the Earth, like stagnant pools, decay, and disease. This aqueous element fits with her being a descendent of the primordial sea gods Ceto and Phorcys, as they symbolized the dangers of the deep, although some sources cite alternative parents.

As a powerful yet beautiful monster, she also represents the perceived threat of strong, attractive women in the patriarchal society of ancient Greece. Echidna was described as unmanageable, indicating a strong, independent character. Because she bore many children, she most noticeably represents creation and potentiality, and in a broader

sense, the cause of disorder in nature.

Echidna found a suitable companion to match her power in Typhon, the many-headed dragon, son of Gaia and Tartarus. Echidna and Typhon lived together in their subterranean home and had a growing family. The partnership of Echidna and Typhon mirrors that of Zeus and his wife Hera, and the feud between them had repercussions for generations.

It is her offspring that Echidna is most well known for, and the reason she is called the mother of monsters. Echidna and Typhon's first two children were the multi-headed dogs with serpent tails, Orthrus and Cerberus. Following these two brutal brothers were the Hydra, a regenerating multi-headed serpent; the Chimera, a lion-goat-snake hybrid; and the Sphinx, part woman, part winged lion. As time went on, multiple writers associated more creatures to the mother of monsters.

On the surface, Echidna may merely appear to be a convenient character to attribute monstrous offspring to because she does not have a prominent role in famous myths. However, most of these myths do involve her children or grandchildren. While Echidna herself avoided being the main opponent to any heroes, there is one story where 'an echidna' matches her description very closely.

On the way home from his tenth labor, Hercules was lured by a cave-dwelling echidna while looking for his missing horses that she had stolen and hidden. The echidna was half beautiful maiden and half snake and told Hercules that he could have his horses back if he stayed with her for a while. Thus, she bore three sons, Agathyrsus, Gelonus, and Scythes, who she brought up in the cave after she eventually allowed Hercules to leave with his horses. All three sons went on to be the fathers of mortal tribes, and the youngest son, Scythes, became the king of Scythia.

It is likely that this story was intended to warn against beautiful and intelligent women, like Echidna herself, and that these characteristics were somehow undesirable or unnatural. This is emphasized by the stark

contrast between the womanly torso and snake body.

Perhaps Echidna was smart enough to avoid the limelight but was nonetheless a powerful driving force behind her children and her husband Typhon in his tirade against the Olympian gods. As history has been known to forget the influence of great women, maybe mythology has forgotten the influence of a great female monster. While details of Echidna are limited, her effects are felt throughout many of the most famous Greek myths.

Chapter 37: Jörmungandr

Origin: Norse Mythology

The spring had not come, nor the summer; only winter following winter. There was thick sea ice where there had never been before. Icy winds blasted the world of men, and the ground suddenly rumbled. Underneath the ice, in the bowels of the cold ocean, writhed the large

Midgard serpent, and he had grown restless waiting. The never-ending winter indicated one thing to the monster: now was the time. He launched himself upwards with explosive strength, blasting straight through the thick ice, sending gigantic chunks sailing through the air. He flung his humongous body onto the land in one colossal leap, causing an earthquake strong enough to break all chains, releasing all who had been bound. Those who saw him were terrified; they knew Ragnarok had come at last and tried to run. With his mouth gaping wide, the awoken serpent spat forth a spray of black venom that none who crossed his path had escaped from; their half-formed screams dying in their throats. Now Jörmungandr would join his kin and bring the end to the time of the gods.

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Jörmungandr is the son of the trickster god Loki and the giantess Angrboda (meaning ‘she who bodes anguish’). Thus, Jörmungandr’s siblings are Fenrir, the giant wolf, and Hel, the girl of life and death. All three are foretold to have an important role to play during the apocalyptic battle of Ragnarok.

When the god Odin found out about these secret monstrous offspring, he had them brought to Asgard. Odin had received a prophecy that his death would come at Fenrir’s jaws. But while Odin was trying to change his fate, his actions only sealed it.

Jörmungandr was flung into the sea by Odin, and with nothing to limit his growth, grew so large that he could completely encircle Midgard, the land of men. In contrast to his siblings, Jörmungandr is much more animalistic and always made his violent tendencies known by spitting venom at the gods, notably Thor. The gods doubted that they could tame Jörmungandr’s brother Fenrir so they bound him with a cord from which he could not escape. Their sister Hel was sent to rule over the underworld, where she maintained diplomatic relations with both the dead and the living—until one day, she too would choose sides.

Belief in a giant sea serpent is a common feature of ancient coastal communities, and Norse mythology is no exception. The tale of Jörmungandr likely started out as a legend to explain violent seas, tidal

waves, or earthquakes. Norse people lived by the sea, gathered food from it, and are famous for traveling across it, so this accounts for Jörmungandr's popularity in ancient times.

There are several surviving carved picture stones featuring Jörmungandr in Sweden, Denmark, and Northern England from around the 8th to 10th Centuries. There is some consensus that these stones portray Thor and Jörmungandr on a particularly memorable fishing trip. If the interpretation of the stones is correct, this means that the same legend had been told for hundreds of years before it was ever written down in the *Prose Edda*, showing just how well-loved it was.

Thor had gone fishing with the giant Hymir. Considering Thor had brought the head of Hymir's most prized ox to use as bait, the trip had not gotten off to a great start. However, they continued, and Hymir proudly caught two enormous whales for dinner before Thor had even cast off. Thor rowed them out to deeper water while Hymir argued that they should return home with their catch. As Thor undoubtedly intended, his choice of bait proved to be perfect for hooking Jörmungandr the Midgard serpent. The mighty Thor hauled Jörmungandr towards them while the serpent writhed and resisted, causing horrendous waves. As Jörmungandr's head breached the sea's surface, it spat poison at Thor but narrowly missed. Thor pulled Jörmungandr closer and reached for his hammer to finish him off. Hymir, terrified that Thor was about to start Ragnarok, cut the line, and Jörmungandr disappeared back under the waves. Hymir begged that they go back to shore. Thor and Jörmungandr would meet again, and they had both sworn to kill each other.

During Ragnarok, Jörmungandr and Thor will come face to face for the final time. There is no escaping this fate. Thor will kill Jörmungandr with his hammer, but before he can take ten steps away, on the ninth step, he will fall, Jörmungandr's poison having beaten him at last.

During the time of the Vikings, Jörmungandr's extraordinary length was emphasized by saying he could reach around the whole of Midgard

and grasp its own tail in its mouth. Accordingly, there has been much commentary on Jörmungandr being an example of an ouroboros, a circular serpent symbol prevalent in much of the ancient world, most famously Egypt. It represents the circle of life, death, and rebirth. As Jörmungandr represents the beginning of the end, after which the world will be repopulated, this does seem to be an appropriate parallel.

In recent times, inspiration has been drawn from Jörmungandr in Marvel's *Thor* series, games such as *God of War*, and fantasy writers like Neil Gaiman.

But for now, Jörmungandr will remain under the sea until he arises to signal the beginning of the end and trigger Ragnarok. Because the gods are unable to prevent Ragnarok, despite their attempts, Jörmungandr symbolizes predetermination and destiny, in addition to the violent dangers of the deep.

Chapter 38: Níðhöggr

Origin: Norse Mythology

The ash leaves had recently fallen, creating a crunchy carpet on the ground below. Rays of autumn sunlight made their way through the many branches, and brown ash keys sporadically spiraled down to meet the leaves. A red squirrel nimbly descended the trunk, its claws effortlessly gripping the deep fissures of the aged bark.

Things had grown too quiet recently, and the squirrel had decided it was time to stir up some trouble. It had first scampered to the very top of the great ash tree, along the branches extending into the heavens, to see what the eagle had to say. It had only taken a few embellishments from the squirrel to get the conversation going in the desired direction. With glee, it could still hear the outbursts of the enraged eagle it had left behind on the topmost branches. On the long way down, the squirrel pondered how to maximize the effect of the eagle's insults for his next listener.

At the bottom of the tree, the squirrel leaped through a hole and ran along the familiar roots at the roof of the dark and dingy cavern until he found the creature he sought. A long, grimy body half slithered, half crawled over the remnants of life that littered the cave. Two beady, glinting eyes followed the squirrel's approach. The squirrel ran up to the serpent and chattered its hateful messages. The serpent listened intently, becoming very still, and its expression growing unmistakably darker. Upon hearing the eagle's words, Níðhöggr was so incensed it clamped its jaws onto the roots of the ancient ash so violently that the vast tree shook. The squirrel quivered with delight as the nine worlds trembled.

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Sometimes called a dragon or worm, Níðhöggr (anglicized to Nidhogg) is the serpent that lives among the roots of the Yggdrasil, the World Tree. Meaning 'Malice Striker' in Old Norse, Níðhöggr gnaws at the roots of the sacred Yggdrasil. Additionally, in Viking society, the word níð was an insult meaning 'dishonorable villain', which is fitting for Níðhöggr's actions.

In a 17th century manuscript in the care of the Árni Magnússon Institute in Iceland, there is a detailed illustration of the Yggdrasil depicting its principal inhabitants. At the top of the tree sits an eagle; among the branches, four stags and a horned squirrel, and shown among the roots is Níðhöggr. The serpent is depicted with a long wingless body in mottled greens and browns, with two short forelegs. Spikes run down the length of its neck, and what can be interpreted as two horns protrude from its head. With probably jagged teeth, Níðhöggr is shown biting the roots of the tree. Behind Níðhöggr skulk some of its serpentine brethren.

In the Poetic and Prose Eddas, the Yggdrasil supports the nine worlds, and it has three principal roots that reach out into different realms: one to the well of the Aesir at the home of the gods, and the second to the well of wisdom in the land of the frost giants. The final root reaches into the spring of all rivers in the underworld, where Níðhöggr lurks, in the cold and gloomy home of mist.

In one of the Poetic Eddas, the god Odin describes cosmological law:

Listen and I will tell you. The roots of the Yggdrasil travel in three directions, one to the underworld, one to the frost giants, and one to the learned men. Ratatoskr, the squirrel, scurries up and down the sacred ash tree, carrying words from the eagle above to Níðhöggr below. Among the branches, four stags lift their necks to nibble the shoots on the highest boughs. More serpents than any fool can imagine hide beneath the tree, forever gnawing away at it. The noble Yggdrasil endures more suffering than men can know. The stags bite it from above, rot sets in from the sides, and the Níðhöggr gnaws it from below.

In a different poem, it is said that Níðhöggr also torments the bodies of the dead, tearing at their corpses. The spring where Níðhöggr lives is compared to the venomous hall of torture in the underworld reserved for murderers, adulterers, and oath-breakers. Because the woven mass of snakes that form the hall of torture spit venom onto the dead, it could be that Níðhöggr is venomous too, exacerbating the damage it does to the roots of the Yggdrasil. Because these roots support the nine worlds, the damage Níðhöggr does to the Yggdrasil is significant and poses a threat to all life.

Níðhöggr lives within the underworld so is associated with Hel, the being of life and death who rules there. Hel lords over those who have not died in battle, but had a death lacking honor, such as dying from sickness or old age, as per the Vikings. Accordingly, Níðhöggr represents suffering and decay. Often unseen but nevertheless ever-present, Níðhöggr, like the passing of time towards old age and death, is unavoidable.

Níðhöggr symbolizes the suffering that is an inevitable part of life, and it is up to gods and mortals to achieve balance, like Yggdrasil the World Tree, by responding with nobility and grace.

Chapter 39: Ajatar

Origin: FINNISH MYTHOLOGY

White lichen and hairy moss clung to the north side of the cup-stone. As the hunter sang his offering song, he put a silver coin into one of the shallow holes in the rock, and into another, he placed sweet rye cakes. He was praying for bounteous hunting to feed and clothe his family With the last note of his song, he surreptitiously glanced up at the beings gathered there. They were appeased by his efforts, and a daughter of the Northland stepped forward. The hunter kept his eyes fixed on the ground.

From her sleeve, the daughter of the Northland pulled a red thread and twisted it against her cheek. She threw one end across the river, where it disappeared into a drift of snow. As she set the other end down at her feet, the thread transformed into a narrow redwood bridge. Across it would walk, bear, moose, deer, fox, and hare so the hunter would be able to provide meat and fur for his village. He crossed the bridge and set off for home feeling exceptionally pleased.

But after the animals had crossed, the redwood bridge still stood. And when night fell upon the Northland, across the bridge walked Bitter Wind, Sharp Frost, Fire, Sudden Snowfall, Pleurisy, Atrophy, Cancer, and Gout. Lastly, Worm slithered across the bridge. All were the children of Ajatar and would bring untold suffering to the mortal realm.

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Ajatar's homeland is the otherworldly Northland, or Pohjola, a bleak, dark, foreboding place in the far north. It is ceaselessly cold but associated with wild animals because the further northwards hunters went away from human habitation, the more likely they were to have a successful hunt.

Inhabitants of the Northland were ancient pagan gods and their children, who mortals appealed to for help. Despite their capacity for menace, they were mighty and could be placated by suitable offerings. There are several stories of assistance and healing coming out of the Northland, such as a boy bringing special ice to heal burns. But evils also emerged from there, such as sickness and disease. In traditional Finnish belief, illness took the form of unseen characters with human propensities that could be expelled or even sent to others via magic.

The modern conception of Ajatar is an evil female spirit that lurks in the forest and spreads disease. Sometimes she is depicted with the lower body of a snake, and sometimes she is also young and beautiful like the half-serpent Echidna from Greek mythology, also a mother of monsters. But Ajatar wandering the mortal realm is not where her story began:

Deep in the Northland, on the Hill of Pain, sat three sisters called the Pain Maidens. They were the daughters of Tuoni, the god of death.

Together they collected all of the pain from the mortal realm, for it had escaped one day when their grandmother accidentally spilled some. The sisters stoked the fire, sifted through the torments of mortals, and boiled the world's pain in a blackened kettle. When it was ready, the pain was poured into stones and sealed there because the stones didn't bemoan their suffering.

But time wore on, and one of the Pain Maidens lamented the suffering she experienced from endlessly taking people's pain away. By now, she was past her youth and bitter. She left her sisters and went out into the world. This mistress of the Northland, daughter of Tuoni, became pregnant to the east wind. She returned to the Northland to give birth to her evil brood of diseases in the bathhouse.

This version of Ajatar can be found mentioned several times within an extensive collection of Finnish magic songs collected and analyzed by John Abercromby. Multiple entries refer to Ajatar as a huge Pain Maiden with a long plait to her ankles and call her Tuoni's daughter. Some entries tell she is the mother of diseases, the origin of cancer, and tends the fires to boil pain. One song calls her Kipu-tyttö, one of the daughters of Tuoni to be found on the Hill of Pain. This collection of songs is gathered from across Finland, and many different versions were translated and recorded with no attempt to change them to make them conform with each other.

Based on the same traditional magic songs and beliefs is The Kalevala, an epic poem and the most well-known work of Finnish folklore. But to make it a coherent whole, some characters have been merged or split. In The Kalevala, the mother of diseases is named Loviatar, and the author adds that she grew old, ugly, and blind and was black in heart, soul, and appearance, making her the worst of Tuoni's daughters.

In the traditional magic songs, Ajatar is appealed to for easing pain. There are also songs about the origin of snakes, charming snakes, and snakebites, but Ajatar is not associated with them. Although Ajatar gives

birth to a snake, the origin of snakes is attributed to Hiisi (in later works called Ajatar's grandfather). Thus, Ajatar's serpent body seems to be a recent addition in novels inspired by The Kalevala and Greek mythology.

As many characters are often split or combined in Finnish mythology, it appears that Ajatar started off as one of the Pain Maidens. She was the daughter of a god and initially toiled with her sisters to ease the pain of mortals. Inspiring many modern works, Ajatar has taken the form of a female spirit often presented as a serpent hybrid, and she continues to symbolize suffering and disease.

Chapter 40: Zilant

Origin: TATAR LEGEND

Gol was no longer sure that trespassing in the royal meadow had been a good idea. As he stood there, in his dirty peasant garb, he looked in vain for his old mare, who had wandered off into the lush grass. In a moment of rash bravery, he had ordered his two companions to stay in the tent, and he didn't trust his voice to ask them to come and stand with him now. They had all received a message from a knight that Her Royal Highness was sending a most indomitable guardian against them. Gol had killed the knight, riotously flailing his ax around, but Gol's

bravado had leaked away since, as if it had seeped through the soles of his tattered shoes and into the soft earth.

The sound of clanking chains among the vast oak trees near the top of the hill brought him sharply from his thoughts, and a dark shape rose into the air. It was the color of gunmetal with angular wings and a long twisting tail. The guardian opened its formidable maw and roared as it flew towards Gol like an arrow. Gol drew himself up bravely and was ready to face his death with courage. But the guardian was a suspicious creature, and pulled up short upon seeing Gol's ragged appearance, convinced there must be trickery at play. Gol took his chance, and a lucky blow to the head knocked the beast out. It collapsed heavily onto the grass, and Gol struck it again and again, wild with fear that it would wake up to finish him off. He looked at its broken scaly body, the once-mighty wings now crumpled like paper. No one would doubt Gol the peasant had killed a knight now that he had slain Zilant.

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In the heart of the city of Kazan, in western Russia, a monument of Zilant takes center stage near the Kremlin walls. Zilant is a gray-black scaly dragon with sharp teeth and a red forked tongue. It has large leathery wings and a long serpentine tail ending in a spike or arrow. At the end of its two legs are golden rooster-like clawed feet. This famous dragon is a familiar image in the city because it forms the city's flag and coat of arms and has a long and well-documented history in heraldry, where it is often given a golden crown.

Kazan boasts a vibrant combination of Russian and Tatar culture, and Tatars are the largest Turkic-speaking ethnic group in Russia. The Russian word for Zilant comes from the Tatar word meaning 'snake,' whereas the Tartars call Zilant 'dragon' or 'snake-dragon.' As well as the name, the folklore and legends surrounding Zilant also stem from Tatar stories. It was a common Tatar belief that any snake that lived for one hundred years would grow wings and transform into a dragon which is reflected in the stories:

In days gone by, there was once a beekeeper that lived on Zilantaw Hill near the city of Kazan. The city itself was not where it is now but further away from the river. The beekeeper had a daughter, and she liked to accompany him when he smoked his hives and collected the honey on

Zilantaw Hill.

When the daughter of the beekeeper married, she moved to another part of the city. Now she had to carry water a long way from the river, and she was not impressed with the city's layout that caused her so much extra daily work.

Feeling irked, she complained to Kazan Khan, the ruler, that the city would be better closer to the river near Zilantaw Hill. But the Khan pointed out that there were too many snakes there. The beekeeper's daughter suggested they burn the snakes while they were hiding under piles of sticks and then move the city. The Khan agreed, and soon his army thought they had successfully killed all of the snakes. However, one remained. It was the king of the snakes, the grand, winged Zilant. The dragon flew away across the lake but returned periodically to terrorize the city of Kazan.

Some stories tell of brave heroes defeating Zilant, but others are certain that Zilant still lives. One version suggests that Zilant descended into the lake to escape his pursuers and may still hide in the depths. In other tales, Zilant no longer attacks the city because he was persuaded with gold, and he still guards the Khan's treasure to this day in secret caves.

The city of Kazan was historically a boundary fortress, and there were many stories of flying monsters in the surrounding areas. This reflects the historical turbulence of these boundary regions due to conflict between Islam and paganism. The dragon Zilant used to represent power and destruction and was usually an opposing force in building the city of Kazan. However, with great courage and ingenuity, he was overcome, or at least persuaded to change sides, representing the resilience of the people when united towards a common goal.

In modern times, Zilant holding a Tatarstan tulip forms the heart of the logo for the Special Olympics World Winter Games 2022, emblematic of friendship, hospitality, and joy. From a fierce adversary

to a popular emblem, Zilant has come to be regarded with fondness and represents guardianship and hospitality.

Chapter 41: Grootslang

Origin: SOUTH AFRICAN MYTHOLOGY

I had not been deterred by the worried faces of my team. No one else had attempted this before, but I was sure there was treasure down there. I was determined to go home mightily rich or die trying, so I descended into the Wonder Hole on a winch cable. When my boots finally touched rock, the circle of daylight above me seemed very small, and the beam cast by my electric torch was pitiful. The air smelt of sulfur, and my shirt clung to me in the stifling heat. I could see that the Wonder Hole opened into a cavern and that what looked like other tunnels

went off at angles.

I tried to get a better look around, thinking that if there were diamonds there, I could bring a whole team down. But with better torches. Suddenly something glinted in my torchlight. If it was a diamond, it was big. I strained my eyes and tried to get an improved view. The ledge was too small for me to go anywhere, and the winch cable had run out. There was a second glint next to the first. They moved together, rising like eyes. Next, I heard a scraping sound, like a heavy leather sack being dragged across sand. I shouted to my team to hoist me up, and the glinting reflections disappeared. There was a shift in the air, and I was instantly surrounded by flapping bats. My torch tumbled from my hand and bounced off the ledge below. I watched the torch as my team pulled me up; it flickered out and crashed somewhere far below. I was relieved to be quickly out of there and decided to look in other places to make my fortune. Places that did not have a giant Grootslang guarding them.

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Many reported sightings of the giant serpent Grootslang are concentrated around the Orange River in the Richtersveld, an arid, rocky landscape in the northwestern corner of South Africa. A sinkhole that descends straight down into the earth, before linking with the underground limestone cave network and making its way to the sea, is often credited with being the entrance to Grootslang's domain. The entrance hole is circular, nearly fifteen feet wide, and called the Wonder Hole.

Locals say that the caves are filled with gold, diamonds, and other precious stones jealously guarded by Grootslang. It is a cruel and cunning creature that lures prey into its lair at night and will devour trespassers. However, due to its greed for treasures, if caught by Grootslang, it may be possible to bargain for freedom if you have enough gold or diamonds, but there are no survivors to confirm this story. Over the years, many disappearances have been attributed to Grootslang, although the treacherous terrain is perilous enough. Many prospectors have gone missing while searching for diamonds, rather than having them to give away in exchange for their freedom.

As old as the world, Grootslang is a primordial creature that locals believe was erroneously made by the gods.

When the world was new, and the gods were filling it with their creations, they made many animals. But the gods were yet unpracticed at this, and they made a severe mistake. One of the first animals they made were the grootslangs. The gods crafted the grootslangs with the features of what we now call elephants and snakes combined. They had four legs, large ears and tusks, a long trunk, and a very long thick tail that slithered over the ground. The gods admired their powerful creation, but when they set the grootslangs upon the land, they realized that they were driven by their cunning natures, which was a disastrous combination when paired with their strength and intelligence.

The gods decided to destroy them, and to do this, they split them in half. One-half of each grootslang became an elephant with strength and intelligence. The other half became a python and kept the cunningness but was now less dangerous than before. This is why huge elephants have only skinny tails. Meanwhile, the very first grootslang had slipped away unseen and hidden in the underground caves, keeping its deadly combination of features for eternity.

Grootslang is Afrikaans for ‘big snake,’ although the appearance is described somewhat differently in the origin myth. The area renowned for Grootslang sightings was popular with prospectors, and there are multiple reports of three-foot-wide trails in the soft mud on the banks of the river that eventually disappear into the water. There are also eyewitness accounts of giant serpents claimed to be forty to fifty feet long. The area does have a history of giant pythons and even sightings of giant black crocodiles, likely contributing to the tales of Grootslang.

Locals say that to see Grootslang, with its glinting diamonds for eyes, is to feel its unnerving evil influence. This acts as a potent reminder of the perils of being driven by greed for valuable material possessions. Some things are better left alone, especially if the cost will be your life. So at this rate, Grootslang may jealously guard its treasure for the rest of time.

Chapter 42: Kiyohime

Origin: JAPANESE FOLKLORE

The senior priest had a dream. Only it wasn't quite a dream, neither was it reality, but an apparition in between. In his vision, two serpents appeared to him. One described himself as the young monk from the temple bell, reborn as a snake, and the other was his killer. The monk-snake told the senior priest that the actions of the vengeful serpent had bound them together in their next lives. If the senior priest would kindly transcribe the Lotus Sutra and dedicate it to him, it would free him from the cycle of suffering with this lustful creature. The snake-monk was

sure the sutra would enable him to attain enlightenment and be delivered from suffering.

The senior priest did as entreated. He copied the Lotus Sutra, held the dedication ceremony, and everyone at the temple prayed reverently. Shortly after this, the senior priest dreamed of the two beings again, but they were wearing beautiful white robes and were no longer snakes. They spoke to him and thanked him for freeing them. Due to the Lotus Sutra, they had both left their serpentine bodies behind and now could be reborn in separate heavens, their fates no longer entwined. The two figures parted from each other and faded away into the heavens. The senior priest awoke with a profound feeling of peace and at once settled down to reread the Lotus Sutra. He was sure it would protect him from the attentions of lustful women like the passionate Kiyohime serpent.

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Kiyohime was a fire-breathing serpent in a well-known Japanese folktale. With a long twisting body topped with spikes, she was coated in green and red scales. Her hideous face, surrounded by a green mane, comprised two bulging eyes and a single antler-type horn between two animal ears.

The tale of Kiyohime, the woman fueled by desire who turned into a serpent, really began as the story of Anchin the young monk and can be found in folktales from the 11th century onwards. Before the 18th century, Kiyohime was unnamed in these early stories, and her character varied from a widow or wife to other female relatives. However, the underlying themes of the story remained unchanged.

As a monk was traveling on a pilgrimage to the Grand Shrines of Kumano, he stayed over as a guest in someone’s home, as was the custom. The daughter of the household, Kiyohime, was very much taken with the handsome young monk and asked him to stay with her. He declined but said he would return this way after his pilgrimage and come back for her.

She waited and waited in anticipation, but he did not return. When Kiyohime saw some other pilgrims returning from Kumano, she hastened out into the street in her bare feet to ask if they had seen her

young monk. They had, but he had gone a different way back, towards Dojo-ji temple. Feeling hurt and betrayed, she raced in that direction and caught up with him on the road. When she accosted him, he said she was mistaken, that it wasn't him she was looking for, and disappeared into the crowd. Ordinarily, Kiyohime would have felt shame, but instead, she became enraged and followed after him, gradually taking on some features of a serpent and spitting fire.

A ferryman had taken Anchin across the river to Dojo-ji temple, but he refused when Kiyohime asked him to take her across. The ferryman told her that the monk Anchin had instructed him not to take her in his boat. Forced to complete her transformation into a serpent, Kiyohime swam across the river, leaving her discarded clothes behind. At the temple, Anchin was hidden under the great bell, but she quickly sniffed him out. She wrapped her body around the bell, let forth a blast of fire, and burned him to death, leaving only charred remains. She then threw herself into the river and drowned.

This well-loved folktale represents the conflict between the force of pure and noble spirituality and the force of unbridled desire. It was an integral part of the Kumano pilgrimage to observe abstinence, and the most traditional versions of the tale portray Kiyohime as lascivious and the monk Anchin as surprised and frightened by her advances. In other versions, he is not so dismissive of her less vulgar attentions. The picture scrolls in Dojo-ji temple that illustrate this story paint a sympathetic picture of Kiyohime resigned to wait patiently for Anchin's return. Only after he rejects her does she begin to turn into a serpent and succumbs to the lure of revenge.

A recurrent theme in Dojo-ji tales is the threat posed by lustful women because this was a tool used to warn the young male monks of the temptations of breaking their abstinence. The story is also used to highlight the power of the Lotus Sutra as one of the most venerated scripts in Mahayana Buddhism and a source of salvation.

Comparing different versions of the folktale, it is unclear who was

most at fault at the outset, Kiyohime or Anchin, but maybe it is not supposed to be clear, and the two intertwined snakes at the end of the picture scroll could indicate this. The overall message seems to be that people should beware of excessive passion, reflect on their behavior, and always measure their words carefully.

Chapter 43: Scylla

Origin: GREEK Mythology

Sailing between a rock and a hard place, that's what the narrow strait promised. The captain had to choose between sailing close to a treacherous whirlpool, or a cave said to be a monster's lair. The whirlpool sounded a lot less far-fetched than a cave-dwelling monster, so the captain misjudged it as an easy choice. He gave the order to steer the vessel in the direction of the cave. His crew was looking out for strange currents when the captain heard a yelp, like a barking puppy coming from the rocky shore.

He remembered the stories then, of a savage monster that could not be fought, only fled from, with several hungry heads on long necks. With new fear, he looked towards the cave as out darted the gigantic beast herself. Before his crew had time to look around, six were snatched up by rows of jagged teeth in hungry mouths. The monster turned to fling her catch onto the rocks at the mouth of her lair. The captain knew not to stay and fight but to escape as quickly as possible, before losing another six of his crew to the voracious Scylla.

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Scylla was a ferocious sea monster who lived in a cave on the coast of a narrow channel between Italy and Sicily. The Messina Strait is a narrow stretch of water between Italy and Sicily, with currents strong enough to rip up seaweed. It has opposing currents that alternate several times a day, causing whirlpools that are dangerous to smaller boats. This hazardous area undoubtedly inspired the tales of Scylla and Charybdis as an explanation for the natural phenomena and sailors lost to the waves. On one side of the strait lived Scylla, and on the other side lived Charybdis, a violent whirlpool who could sink whole boats. It was said that no ship could pass through this perilous area unscathed.

Scylla had six heads on long serpentine necks that would dart out of the cave and snatch sailors to devour. Each mouth had three rows of shark-like teeth ideal for catching sea creatures such as dolphins when no boats were around. Scylla had the upper body of a beautiful woman but the lower body of a strange sea creature. In ancient vase paintings, she is often shown with a fish-type lower body and a waist sporting the heads and front legs of dogs. She is said to have twelve dangling legs, which are likely a combination of the dog legs and tentacles. Her voice was like a yelping puppy, but she was much more deadly than she sounded.

Most early stories give Scylla as the daughter of the sea god Phorcys and his wife Ceto, where Cratais is cited as an alternative name for Ceto. However, in later Roman writings, she is given a tragic back-story.

Once there was a beautiful maiden named Scylla who lived by the

sea. She often swam in the waves and played with the sea nymphs, the Nereids. They knew each other well and chatted happily about the events of their lives. On one of these occasions, when Scylla left the water to retrieve her clothes, Glaucus, the sea god of fishermen, spotted her and instantly fell in love with her. She saw his bristly face and seaweed-covered upper body and wasn't sure if he was a god or a monster. Forgetting her clothes, she fled in fear.

Glaucus went to Circe, the goddess of sorcery, to ask for her help. He asked Circe to concoct a love potion to make Scylla enamored with him. Surprised and hurt, Circe confessed her love for Glaucus and tried to persuade him to make all parties happy in one go and accept her instead. Glaucus spurned Circe by saying that green leaves would sooner grow under the sea and seaweed on the hills than he would change his love for Scylla while she was alive.

Hearing this, Circe was overcome with rage and jealousy and made not a love potion but a poison from various herbs. Circe poured the poison into the pool where Scylla was known to bathe, chanting devilish words. When Scylla came there, she waded waist-deep into the pool and was metamorphosed into a blood-thirsty monster with the lower body of serpents surrounded by dogs. Scylla was terrified and tried to flee, but the snapping jaws she was running from were now a part of her. Glaucus was heartbroken and collapsed into the embrace of the waiting Circe.

Scylla also features in the stories of the heroes Hercules and Odysseus. While Hercules was taking the cows of Geryon home, Syclla stole some of the cows. Hercules managed to kill her, but her father, Phorcys, restored her to life. On the return journey from the Trojan War, Odysseus had to sail through the strait with his men. The sorceress Circe advised him to sail close to Scylla instead of Charybdis. She explained that Scylla would take only six of his men if they sailed quickly, whereas they might all be lost to the violent whirlpool.

Early interpretations, where Scylla is a monster-daughter of sea gods, are that she represents the dangers of a treacherous stretch of water

and offers an explanation for sailors lost at sea. In later versions, she is an example of an innocent woman being punished by the gods out of jealousy because someone else found her attractive.

Chapter 44: Zahhak

Origin: PERSIAN FOLKLORE

Rallying behind the three heroes, the people of the kingdom had their evil ruler surrounded. The angry mob was armed with whatever they had picked up on the way, and the three heroes had mace, hammer, and blacksmith's tongs. The evil ruler looked left and right for the opportunity to escape, but there was no opening. The pair of shiny black serpents on his shoulders kept the mob at a distance, striking out at anyone who came too close and spitting venom.

Someone in the crowd threw a stone. It had not been the only one, but it was the first to meet its mark squarely in the face. Torn skin opened up under the ruler's eye but, instead of blood, something black welled to the surface. A cockroach crawled out of the tear in his cheek, followed by another, running down his face. The crowd reeled in horror, and the ruler let out a wild laugh.

When the mace struck him on the head, he crumpled unconscious onto the street. The black snakes lay limply beside him in the dust, but more cockroaches poured from the mace wound on his head. The heroes realized they could not kill him, or the world would be overrun with vermin. The blacksmith threw his leather apron over the now seething body. They decided to bind him and leave him imprisoned in a cave at the top of the tallest mountain. And there Zahhāk would remain, chained for eternity.

***

Zahhāk is a tyrannical king who came to power by murdering his father. He followed much bad advice from Ahriman, the Evil Spirit, who appeared to him in several guises intending to bring indescribable suffering to humankind. To bring Zahhāk further under his control, Ahriman caused two black snakes to grow out of Zahhāk's shoulders. The snakes were bloodthirsty and craved human flesh and would have devoured Zahhāk's head had they not been kept fed by other means.

The character of Zahhāk famously appeared in Ferdowsi's Book of Kings, the Shahnama, which is one of Iran's most important folklore texts. It is an epic poem that tells the story of the rise and fall of this tyrannical leader.

An Arabian king had a son named Zahhāk. Zahhāk was a clever and attractive young man but easily influenced by the words of others. Because he was so easily persuaded, Ahriman, the Evil Spirit, decided to use Zahhāk for his own purposes. Pretending to be a friend, he convinced Zahhāk to take over his father's kingdom by leading him to fall down a pit on the way to morning prayers.

Next, Ahriman took on the appearance of the royal chef and prepared many fabulous meals for Zahhāk. After several days of

feasting, Zahhāk asked to congratulate the chef and offered to grant him anything he desired. When Ahriman appeared before Zahhāk as the chef, he asked only to kiss each of his shoulders.

After kissing each shoulder, Ahriman vanished, and two vicious black snakes appeared on each of Zahhāk's shoulders. Zahhāk summoned the finest surgeons to remove them, but they only grew back again, exactly the same as they were before. A new physician came to the palace, but it was once again Ahriman in disguise. He advised Zahhāk to placate the snakes by feeding them a stew made from human brains to prevent them from attacking Zahhāk's own head.

Following Ahriman's advice, Zahhāk brought much suffering to the kingdoms he took over, including Iran, spreading chaos wherever he went. During Zahhāk's rule, two young people from the domain were sacrificed every day to feed the snakes until a trio of heroes came forward to challenge his authority.

The Shahnama, the Book of Kings, was inspired by ancient Persian mythology, though the names were changed to Middle Persian names. Zahhāk was based on the creature Aži Dahāka from Zoroastrian literature. Instead of a man with two serpents protruding from his shoulders, Aži Dahāka was a three-headed demonic monster created by the Evil Spirit, renamed Ahriman in the Shahnama. The three-headed Aži Dahāka was strong and cunning and became a frightful overlord. His rule brought drought, ruin, and chaos which the Evil Spirit delighted in as it affronted the supreme deity or 'Wise Lord.' The struggle between good and evil continues in the Shahnama.

Though both Aži Dahāka and Zahhāk were overthrown and removed from power, neither could be killed, only captured, bound, and imprisoned. Aži Dahāka's story tells of a prophecy predicting his escape at the end of the world where he will ravage the land, consuming people and livestock, until another hero comes forward to defeat him.

The Shahnama became an important symbol of royal legitimacy and

a powerful reminder of how a king should rule. It conveys the message that a king should reign righteously, endorsed by God, as poor leadership brings suffering and chaos to all people in the kingdom.

Zahhāk is invariably portrayed as a hostile outsider taking over Iran, reflecting inter-ethnic rivalries as different peoples invaded each other throughout history and prehistory. As well as the symbolic battle between good and evil, and the snakes representing torment, contained within Zahhak’s story is a warning that heeding bad advice can lead to dire consequences.

Section Five | The Unusual Ungulates

Ungulates are any animal with hooves, such as horses, cows, and boars. Ungulates certainly enabled human civilization to spread around the globe, so it is no wonder they are prominent in myth and folklore.

The most commonly featured ungulate by far is the horse. Domesticated around 6000-5500 BC, horses from myth and folklore are rich in symbolism and meaning. Striking in appearance, horses almost universally symbolize power and freedom because they gave advantage in battle and allowed freedom of movement.

While other ungulates are also domesticated, horses are often seen to serve humans more by choice due to their intelligence and the free spirit they retain. Thus, they lend us their speed, strength, and courage with cooperation and companionship. However, sometimes this speed leads to danger, like the Cheval Mallet from French folklore.

White horses are prevalent in mythology worldwide, often symbolizing purity and heroism worthy of the gods; for example, the Norse god Odin rode an eight-legged white horse, Sleipnir. In direct contrast, human-horse hybrid creatures often represent the wild and lustful side of human nature.

Some of the most well-known mythological creatures of all are equine-inspired, namely Pegasus, the winged stallion, and centaurs, the half horse-half human warriors. Both of these are from Greek mythology, and in this section you will find out about the creatures that preceded centaurs, ipotanes, and a horse no doubt inspired by Pegasus in Islamic tradition, Haizum.

Unicorns, in particular, seem to hold a timeless fascination. You will find several horned mythological creatures in this section, such as the Philippine Anggitay and the Slavic Indrik. Equine-inspired creatures

remain ubiquitous in modern culture—such is their ability to capture the imagination.

Chapter 45: Anggitay

Origin: Filipino Mythology

As soon as the rain stopped, the rainbow the creature had been waiting for appeared. It formed a multi-colored bridge for her to trot across, provided for her by the rainbow god,

Barangaw. Well, at least someone appreciates my beauty, she thought. With the breeze lifting her mane, the creature traveled to Earth, rainbow colors shimmering beneath her golden hooves. She could avoid the Golden Goddess if she went now, while the grass was wet and water was still dripping from the trees.

She stepped off the rainbow and onto the wet forest floor; getting her hooves muddy was worth it if she could find what she was looking for. In a puddle, she saw her reflection. If only she could get her body back, she knew she would be more beautiful than the Golden Goddess again. She was convinced that the Golden Goddess was jealous of her; that was why she was turned into a monster. Then she saw it, the familiar flash of gold through the trees. Anggitay needed that treasure to pay the Golden Goddess to transform her back to her old self. And off she galloped, skidding through the forest with a glint in her eye.

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There are limited records of Anggitay, and at first, accounts appear to be contradictory. This is not uncommon in Filipino mythology as different islands had different beliefs, mythologies, and languages. One report from the Batanga region described a creature that was half beautiful young woman and half bedraggled mare. The beast, thought to be Anggitay, sat up in the boughs of a tree watching passersby.

Other accounts describe a race of beings, anggitays, which could hide up in trees, taking this idea from the Batanga sighting. Anggitays worked together to ambush travelers and steal their jewelry or gold. This does not seem to be grounded in tradition but appears to be a more modern development. However, the link to obtaining gold and jewelry, even by theft, matches a myth from the Visayan region, which appears in personal records from oral tradition. The Visayan myth is about the origin of Anggitay, and the fact that it involves some well-known Visayan deities adds to its credibility.

Originally the daughter of a datu, a regional monarch, Anggitay had the head and upper body of a woman and the legs and body of a horse, like a female centaur. She had an ivory horn in the middle of her forehead, not unlike a unicorn, and golden hooves.

Two Visayan deities were involved in the creation of Anggitay. One was the Golden Goddess, Burigadang Pada Sinaklang Bulawan, the goddess of gold and greed. She punishes people who are greedy for riches, especially if they are thieves. The Golden Goddess is stunningly beautiful and attended to by adoring dwarves. To illustrate her style of justice, she was once tricked into losing a beauty contest to a fairy whom she promptly stamped on and turned into an insect.

Barangaw is the Visayan god of the rainbow. He symbolizes luck, victory in battle, and hope in the face of adversity. He causes rainbows to appear, which enable travel between the heavens and Earth, an idea common in various mythologies. Bangaraw and the Golden Goddess were opposing forces in the story of Anggitay.

A royal datu had a beautiful daughter named Angga, meaning ‘love’ in Visayan. Though she was fair and attractive to look upon, she loved to adorn herself with precious jewelry, whether it was hers or not. The god of the rainbow, Barangaw, spent much of his time watching and admiring her.

Princess Angga was walking one day when she saw dwarves carrying bags of gold and jewelry through the Golden Goddess’ sacred grove. *‘Who does this belong to?’* she asked covetously. The dwarves replied that it belonged to the ‘fairest of the Earth’s children.’ As she was vain and conceited, Princess Angga thought that this must surely be her. She went back to the village and instructed everyone to make her a bejeweled golden throne and carry her back to the grove on it.

In a flash of golden light, the Golden Goddess appeared before Princess Angga, enraged at her vanity and arrogance. The villagers turned to flee from the furious goddess, but she transformed them into yellow field mice. The Golden Goddess cursed Angga for thinking herself more beautiful than the gods: stamping on her toes with her golden slippers turned Angga’s feet into golden hooves. Then, she took off one golden slipper and hit Angga on the forehead with it; an ivory horn promptly grew there. The curse spread and began to turn all of

Angga into an ugly old mare. Barangaw took pity on Angga and tried to reverse the Golden Goddess' curse, but he only managed to restore Angga's face and upper body. The rest of Angga would remain as a horse until she could find seven sacks of gold to give the Golden Goddess in return for her previous form. However, the Golden Goddess ensured this would never happen: she threw gold dust into Angga's eyes, finishing off her transformation into Anggitay. The gold dust in her eyes made Anggitay see the glint of gold wherever she looked, even though there was none.

Barangaw gave Anggitay the ability to travel across the rainbow and find refuge there. He continues to send Anggitay rainbows after the rain so she can come back and seek her gold. However, she is destined to remain Anggitay forever, tricked into seeing gold that is not there as a punishment for her vanity and greed.

Chapter 46: Arion

Origin: Greek Mythology

Polynices should have been pleased that his father-in-law had lent him his horse for the chariot race. To have the fastest ever horse pulling his chariot should have brought him

confidence, but instead, he felt anxious. Yes, the black-maned horse was the swiftest horse anyone had ever seen, but he had an unruly temperament. His father-in-law had given him so much advice about handling the horse that it now rattled around his mind, detached from meaning. He tried to remember: calm him, don't shout at him, and don't let him run off the reins, but don't pull hard on them either, never urge him to go faster… That had not helped: now he felt nauseous. The horse stamped his hooves and tossed his head nervously, unsettling the other horses in line. Polynices got a distinct impression the horse knew he was not his master and was unimpressed.

The mappa cloth fell, and the race began. Polynices claimed the lead with ease, the chariot thundering over the ground faster than he thought possible. Then suddenly, the horse skidded to a halt and reared high, striking out with his front legs, his black mane whipping the air. Before Polynices could understand what had happened, he was flung backward from the chariot. He hit the ground heavily and rolled several times, fearing he was about to get trampled to death by his competitors. Luckily, they had gained such a lead that he was spared from a grizzly end. While he tried to stagger to his feet, he saw the snake apparition that had caused the commotion, and beyond that, already crossing the finish line with an empty chariot: the fastest ever horse, Arion.

***

Black-maned Arion is a horse of exceptional speed, sure to win any chariot race because of his divine origins. In the *Iliad*, Homer famously said that no one could catch up, level with, or overtake you if Arion was pulling your chariot. His name comes from the word for 'braver,' and he is likely considered immortal because he was born of gods.

The majority of sources name Poseidon, the sea god, and Demeter, the goddess of agriculture, as Arion's parents. Alternatives are Gaia, the Earth, or Zephyros, god of the west wind, and a Harpy, although Demeter is said to have spent some time in the guise of a Harpy as well. There is also one story that Poseidon created Arion in a contest with Athena to make something useful for mortals. However, the most commonly accepted account is that Poseidon lusted after Demeter, who turned herself into a mare to disguise herself from him and avoid his pursuit. She hid among a herd of horses owned by Oncius, the god Apollo's son who bred horses. However, Poseidon recognized her even as a mare and turned himself into a stallion and mated with her without

her consent.

Occasionally, Arion is shown with wings in modern depictions, but this could be due to the influence of Pegasus being his half-brother. One later Roman poet, Propertius, said Arion could speak, but it seems to be a creative embellishment that is not consistent with earlier accounts.

Arion had three main masters, Oncius, then Hercules, and finally Adrastus; the latter was made the most famous owner by the detailed accounts of Arion by the poet Statius. Statius gave the most insight into Arion's character and said that his passion to be moving could not be satisfied and that he was as 'changeful as a winter sea.'

In the lands belonging to Oncius, who had many horses, the colt Arion was born to the goddess Demeter. Arion had one sister, Despoina, a fertility goddess. Legend has it that the hero Hercules asked Oncius to give him his fastest horse, Arion, to help him during battle; Oncius agreed. But even for Hercules, Arion was feisty and hard to handle.

After the battle, Hercules gave Arion to Adrastus, the King of Argos. He became Arion's most notable owner and managed to tame Arion to some degree. Adrastus' daughter was married to Polynices, a prince in exile from the kingdom of Thebes, where his brother had taken the throne from him. Adrastus promised to help his son-in-law reclaim the throne. Accompanied by Arion, Adrastus took a large army led by seven champions to claim the kingdom of Thebes for Polynices. This assault became known as the Seven against Thebes.

On the way to Thebes, the inaugural Nemean Games was held as a memorial event for a child, and it included a chariot race. Arion competed in the race, and although he crossed the finish line first, he had thrown Polynices from the chariot and was disqualified. The god Apollo had interfered by spooking Arion with a snake apparition, causing Polynices to fall; thus, Apollo's favored competitor won without outpacing Arion.

When King Adrastus and his seven champions reached the kingdom

of Thebes, there was a bloodbath. The seven champions all perished in the battle that ensued. Polynices and his brother fought each other for the throne, and both died at each other's hands. Adrastus would have surely died too if it was not for his faithful horse Arion who carried him away, easily faster than anyone could pursue them.

Arion lived on and had at least one son, a warhorse who belonged to the warrior Sthenelous who fought in the battle of Troy. Arion represents the archetypal horse, symbolizing victory in competition, bravery in battle, speed to escape your enemies, and a free, unbroken spirit.

Chapter 47: Buraq

Origin: Islamic MYTHOLOGY

The prophet sat with their eyes closed as their mind wandered. They saw a place of peace and purity and sensed unseen beings. A slight sound, like the rustle of a bird's wing, caught the

prophet's attention. Ordinarily, nothing would disturb the prophet's thoughts, so they were surprised by the sensation of coming back to their body and opening their eyes. The afternoon light silhouetted a figure who had not been there before. 'I am Gabriel,' said the figure's voice, only, it was inside the prophet's mind. 'Do not be afraid. You have a journey to undertake, and I have brought you the means by which you will travel.' The prophet was too awed to speak.

Gabriel lifted an outstretched hand: in his palm, there was a miniature carving of a horse. Still unable to speak, the prophet searched Gabriel's face for an explanation, but it was so dazzling no answers could be seen there. Looking back to the horse figurine, it was now larger than it had been before. It was white with multi-colored wings, and as it continued to grow, the prophet saw it had a charming human face. Still growing, with a swish of its peacock-feathered tail, it stepped down from Gabriel's hand. By the time it touched the ground, it was life-sized, with a decorated crown on its head. 'Get on,' said Gabriel's voice kindly. The prophet knew this was going to be an epic journey—on the back of the glorious Buraq.

***

From the Arabic word 'to flash' and the middle Persian word for 'a mount,' Buraq was a flying steed that enabled prophets to complete impossible journeys. Rather than a definite myth that became more obscure with time, Buraq is the opposite, crystallizing over the centuries. At first merely alluded to, Buraq has gradually taken shape, and gender, over time.

Across the Islamic world, in parts of Africa and Persia especially, Buraq was a popular subject in folk art. Originally, Persian descriptions of Buraq did not express whether Buraq was male or female due to the gender-neutral language. Subsequently, carvings and figurines of Buraq compensated for this, depicting Buraq's human face with exquisite femininity. The first indication of Buraq's human face was a reference to a 'smooth cheek,' and it took off from there.

In the 16th Century, Buraq was referred to as a mixed hybrid creature with a human face, wings, and features from camel, donkey, elephant, and ox. Some accounts give Buraq a peacock-feathered tail, fine

jewelry, or leopard spots, making a definitive description of what Buraq would have initially looked like less distinct. Crucially, some of these descriptions caught on more than others, and it was a human face, a white horse's body, and multi-colored wings that really captivated people.

Buraq was first mentioned by writers retelling the Prophet Muhammad's miraculous journey in a single night, called the Night Journey story, or *Isra'*. To make it possible to visit many sacred sites in one night, the angel Gabriel gave Buraq to Muhammad to enable travel at lightning speed.

The Quran alludes to the Night Journey story, with most scholars interpreting it as a journey to Jerusalem, but some as a journey to heaven. This has led to the Night Journey story (*Isra'*) and the story of Muhammad's ascent to heaven (*Mi'raj*) often being merged together in accounts of Muhammad's life and sayings. As one of the most popular stories in Islam, it has captured the heart and imagination of many poets and writers and led to traditional elaborations of the Night Journey story. It is these stories that first breathed life into Buraq and resulted in many beautiful paintings of Muhammad ascending to heaven on the magnificent Buraq. Incidentally, the journey itself, and therefore Buraq, are sometimes considered a dream or vision rather than a physical journey, but nonetheless of great spiritual significance.

Gabriel appeared to Muhammad, waking him from sleep, and brought him Buraq; a white beast, saddled and bridled. Its size was between that of a donkey and a mule, and with each step, it could reach as far as the eye could see.

At first, Buraq shied from Muhammad, but Gabriel explained that this was a rider most honorable to God and Buraq broke out in a sweat in response. Muhammad rode Buraq from Mecca to Jerusalem, stopping at many sacred sites on the way—an impossible feat achieved only with Buraq's lightning speed.

When they arrived at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, Gabriel pointed to a spot on the Western Wall, and a crack appeared in the rock. To this day, this part of the wall is called the Buraq Wall because it is where Muhammad dismounted and tied Buraq. Muhammad then continued his journey by ascending a shimmering ladder to heaven, guided by Gabriel. After returning to Earth, Buraq took Muhammad safely back to Mecca—before the same night was over.

As it is popular to combine the two stories, Buraq is commonly included in the ascent to heaven instead of the ladder. Because Muhammad had been through a difficult time in his life when he met Buraq, she can represent a silver lining to our hardships and makes the impossible possible.

In the modern world, Buraq has lent her name—and connotations of piety and speed—to airlines, bus companies, unmanned drones, and high-speed rail services.

Buraq has become considered female over time, but she differs from many other mythological woman-animal hybrids because she is not sexualized in any way. Rather than a virginal purity, Buraq, with her gleaming white body to transport the worthy, was meant to represent purity in its broadest sense.

Chapter 48: Cheval Mallet

Origin: French Folklore

It had grown late; the weary traveler trudged along the dirt track. The grey evening had turned into a dark, cloudy night, and already the mist was rolling in. It was becoming hard to

see even his hand in front of his face, and every so often, he would end up in the hedge at the side of the road. But he had been delayed, and there was no alternative but to walk. A fine drizzle started to fall, making him feel instantly chilled in the frigid night air. He longed for even the tiniest bit of moonlight to see by, but there was none. He suddenly splashed into a puddle, cursing his luck; now, his feet were wet, making him feel all the more miserable.

As he shook the water from his shoes, he heard a gentle snicker. He nearly jumped out of his skin, but he came across a horse, almost walking into it, and immediately felt reassured. The horse was lying down, as if waiting, by the side of the road. It had a saddle and bride on and was looking towards him as if it recognized him. He called out, 'Hello?' unsure where the owner could possibly be at this time of night. Maybe he could borrow the horse and bring it back in the morning, after dry socks and a warm bed. The traveler reasoned that the horse would be able to see better than he could in this darkness, and at least it would save him from falling into any more puddles. He stroked the horse's warm neck; it seemed perfectly friendly, and he climbed into the saddle.

When the locals found the traveler in the morning, there was nothing but a trampled body in the ditch and some oddly shaped hoof marks nearby. They knew the Cheval Mallet had been again and claimed the poor man's soul.

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In the area around Lac de Grand-Lieu, in the west of France, there are stories of an evil horse that appears to weary travelers on moonless nights. The horse is usually said to be as white as the mists, but occasionally it is a black horse that appears. This has led some to attribute magical powers to the Cheval Mallet, saying that this mysterious horse can change its color at will, perhaps even to avoid being identified.

The Cheval Mallet looks beautiful and serene, fully equipped with a bridle and a comfortable-looking saddle. It may even have offered extra assistance to mount by kneeling down to coax the tired traveler onto its back. However, appearances can be deceiving: the helpful, attractive exterior disguised malicious intent.

If a traveler accepted a ride from the Cheval Mallet and climbed into the saddle, the horse would immediately take off at a terrifying speed. Smoke would curl from its nostrils, and its previously docile eyes would gleam like fire. It would continue to gallop all night, tearing through the countryside, wild with fury. As morning approached, the Cheval Mallet, now looking nothing like the serene beast the traveler had initially laid eyes on, would throw the exhausted rider and trample them to death. A favorite of the Cheval Mallet was to unseat the rider and toss them down a ravine or into the lake. The battered victim had no chance of survival and always gave in to death.

The origin of the Cheval Mallet was likely to explain mysterious deaths of lone travelers or as an answer for finding a body in strange circumstances. It is not inconceivable that people believed they saw a strange horse in the mist on a dark night as their eyes perhaps played tricks on them, perpetuating the story.

Inspired by the story of the Cheval Mallet was a military feast and carnival held in the 17th Century involving actors, with at least one being dressed as the dreaded horse. But the event was banned by the ecclesiastical authorities and subsequently forgotten. More recently, the story has inspired a game, and a folk song called *La Ballade du Cheval Mallet* by Tri Yann.

The only way that you could protect yourself from the Cheval Mallet was to carry an appropriate talisman. If you had six coins marked with a cross, you could throw them in front of the Cheval Mallet as soon as you saw it, and it would be forced to stop; if you were lucky, you would have time for a hasty escape. Crossing yourself was considered a helpful addition, but the best form of protection was a medal or cross of Saint Benedict, the patron saint of Europe, which would protect you from evil, including rendering you safe from the Cheval Mallet. There is even a story that with courage and the protection of Saint Benedict, someone was once able to subdue the Cheval Mallet and command it to take them on a trip to Paris.

The Cheval Mallet is thought to symbolize a murderous psychopomp, a manifestation not only guiding the soul from this world into the next but taking the life in the first place. In traditional French folklore, the moral of the story is to never get on a strange horse and always be prepared with something useful in your pocket. If you do accept a ride from an unknown horse on a moonlit night, you may never return.

Chapter 49: Haizum

Origin: Islamic Mythology

The soldier knew their army was outnumbered, but facing him was a single opponent launching a fierce attack with his sword. The soldier only just managed to block the strike. He

shifted his feet, ready to counterstrike, but when he thrust his sword, it met air. To his surprise, his opponent, so determined to kill him a moment ago, had suddenly turned to flee. The soldier roared and raced after him with his sword aloft. Fleetingly, the soldier thought he heard the pounding hooves, but the air trembled instead of the ground. A stranger's voice called out, 'Forward, Haizum!' from somewhere above his right shoulder, but no one was there. He couldn't help thinking, my name isn't Haizum. He refocused on his quarry; he had nearly caught him.

As the soldier ran, an errant gust of wind blasted him with dust. He heard the crack of a whip, and wiping sand from his face, saw his quarry crumple to the ground. When he reached him, he saw his face was sliced open, from one temple, across his nose, to the opposite cheek. The wound was red raw at the edges but sickeningly discolored where the flesh gaped, as if it was already infected with some strange poison. Again, he looked around, but there was no one to be seen, only the enemy retreating behind a rolling cloud of dust: he couldn't believe his eyes. 'Forward Haizum…' he whispered to himself, and with a flash of realization, '…Haizum is the horse of an angel!'

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According to Islamic traditional writings, elaborations based on the Quran, Haizum is the horse of the archangel Gabriel, a gift from God for being a faithful servant. Haizum is of pure white skin to the point that he appears luminous to those lucky enough to see him.

Haizum is a fitting mount for an angel because he can travel between cosmic planes instantaneously with his large, white, feathered wings. This enables Gabriel to pass on divine messages to prophets, including the Prophet Muhammad. Apparently, Haizum was chosen for Gabriel because he was the most intelligent animal in the universe. This highlights the cultural significance of horses and how intelligent they were considered to be, offering valuable assistance to humans and angels alike.

In the Battle of Badr, Muslim troops numbering just over three hundred faced one thousand Quraysh, a mercantile Arab tribe and staunch opponents of Muhammad and his religious message. Moreover, the Muslim army only had two horses, and the enemy had many. Muhammad, who was leading the Muslim troops, was distressed that

they were so severely outnumbered and prayed fervently to God that they would not all be slaughtered and Islam wiped out before it had truly begun. His prayers were answered as one thousand angels were sent to secure their victory.

Muhammad saw a great sandstorm roll through the valley during the battle, though there was no wind and the ground was soaked from heavy rain the previous night. He saw Gabriel, the angel of revelation, mounted on his white horse Haizum leading half of the angels into battle. The angel Michael, the field commander of the angels, led the other half. Gabriel's battle cry could be heard, 'Forward Haizum!' as they rode the waves of dust, and no hooves touched the ground. The Quraysh turned their backs and began to flee; those who were not quick enough were trampled. Now Muhammad knew he would be victorious and his followers would survive. Due to the aid of the mounted angels, they lived to show mercy to their prisoners.

Another traditional story is that of the Golden Calf, which is mentioned in the Quran. While Moses was away fasting and praying, some of his followers grew restless awaiting his return and were filled with doubt. One of his followers, named Samiri, persuaded the other Israelites that Moses had deserted them and was not coming back. Samiri convinced everyone to give him their gold coins and jewelry, which he then melted down to make a golden calf. He had some dust from under the hooves of Haizum, and he threw it into the calf's mouth, making it seem as if it was partly alive. Such was the power of the dust. The Israelites were amazed and worshiped the golden calf when Samiri claimed that this was their guiding god.

Moses returned and asked Samiri why he had done this. He replied that he was responding to the inclination of his soul when he threw Haizum's dust. After some discussion, and other mishaps, everyone prayed for forgiveness for worshipping a false idol.

By the time Islam was created, the time of Greek mythology had passed, the gods forgotten, and only Greek philosophical and scientific

texts were translated in the Islamic world. However, a white, winged horse had been immortalized in the stars. The constellation of Pegasus was familiar in the early Islamic world and had the name of Faras al-Azam, meaning 'great horse.' Astronomy and astrology were culturally valued, so the white, winged horse was incorporated into Islamic tradition. There is a stunning Iranian luster bowl from the late 12th Century showing a winged horse, the very likeness of Haizum, considered to be derived from Pegasus.

Haizum has the crucial task of transporting the angel Gabriel with his divine messages. He also represents an explanation for sandstorms, which look like they have been whipped up by angels or stampeding horses. Though known by different names, the white, winged horse remains one of the most recognizable mythological creatures in the world.

Chapter 50: Ipotane

Origin: Greek Mythology

Silenus stood away from the stage, leaning on a donkey for support, listening to the audience roar with laughter at some crude innuendo in the play. The townspeople were gathered

for the Dionysian festival; they flocked to enjoy the comedies and tragedies, where music played and wine flowed. Silenus went to take another swig of wine from his jug and laughed at the hint of his own reflection. He was older now: he saw a stubby nose, full lips, and balding head with long pointed ears. He knew if he looked down, he would see his once muscular physique softened and spread like bread dough. How times had changed since his youthful days in the forest; he barely recognized the face rippling back at him.

The god Dionysus swaggered over, marveling at the festivities being held in his name. 'Silenus, my tutor and companion, answer me this,' he boomed, proffering his jug of wine. 'Are you well enough inebriated to share your arcane knowledge of the future with me?'

'Well, Dionysus, my dear student,' Silenus began. 'I have imbibed liberally, so listen and listen well…' He took a steadying breath and flicked his tail, ready to begin: he had so much secret wisdom he would only tell a little; he was an ipotane after all.

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Ipotanes were male human-horse hybrids with a human body, horse's ears and tail, and sometimes a single pair of horse's legs. In ancient Greece, ipotanes were portrayed unclothed and were considered nature spirits. While some early versions of ipotanes walked upright on two horse legs, other depictions had human legs. Ipotanes sometimes have the equine facial features of a flattened nose and mane-like hair. They are considered the origin of several human-animal hybrids: satyrs, men with some horse features; centaurs, a human torso on a four-legged horse body; and fauns, a man with the two legs of a goat. Some ipotanes are depicted as muscular with a head of luscious curly hair, while others are older and balding. Linguistically, ipotane suggests translations from the Greek words for 'knights' and 'horse-people.' As knights often rode horses, this could be one explanation of how these mythical creatures came into existence.

The most well-documented incarnation of ipotanes is the satyr, associated with Dionysus, the god of wine and theatre. Dionysus

represents good times and celebration, and the satyr-type ipotanes are shown as being older, balding, often drunk on wine, and staggering on their human legs. Pottery dating back to the 6th Century BC shows satyrs playing musical instruments and drinking wine from large skins. The satyrs of Dionysus are always shown anatomically exaggerated and sexually aroused. They were renowned for their satyr plays in which they acted as the comic relief, known for their rude wordplay, innuendo, and lewd jokes.

The satyrs that accompanied the god Dionysus were called the Sileni in ancient Greece. Over the course of history, the plural was dropped, and instead, one single satyr was characterized: Silenus. A host of satyrs continued to accompany Silenus and Dionysus, playing musical instruments, drinking, and generally being raucous and raunchy. While celebrating, they could whip themselves into a destructive frenzy, leading to trampled crops and food looted from villages.

Satyrs also had unrestrained animalistic desire when it came to women, both nymph and human. Although satyrs loved women, their wild and rambunctious behavior meant that women did not always love them back. A rejected satyr did not always take ‘no’ for an answer, so they also represented uncontrolled lust and the subjugation of women.

Silenus was considered the father of the satyrs and a friend, companion, and tutor to the god Dionysus. When Silenus had drunk enough wine to be inebriated, it is said that he would share knowledge of the arcane and tell prophecies of the future. This characteristic stemmed from the conviction that ipotanes possessed great wisdom, if only they could be persuaded to share it.

Possessing hidden knowledge is a concept that has been passed on from ipotanes to centaurs. Though ipotanes are considered the origin of centaurs, their personalities are very different from satyrs. While centaurs are seen as noble warriors of the forest, satyrs are rambunctious and slovenly. On the one hand, they could be the life of the party, but on the other, they were vulgar and crude, unlike centaurs.

Over time, some of the animalistic qualities of satyrs stopped being taken so literally, and they were instead depicted as human men with their beastly demeanor, after having too much to drink, being more metaphorical. Describing a satyr as a man with animalistic behavior allows someone something of an excuse for someone who may have disgraced themselves the night before. They were merely a beastly satyr, attending Dionysus, their god of merriment and revelry, and things got a little out of control.

The next incarnation of the ipotane was in Roman times when, by then, the satyr had evolved into the faun, with two goat legs and a human torso. Fauns still had a liking for music but a much calmer demeanor than satyrs and a love of the forest like centaurs, which is assumed to be more in keeping with the original ipotanes.

Though it is hard to pinpoint an original version of the ipotane, certain characteristics can be traced back through accounts of centaurs, fauns, and satyrs. Unfortunately, not all stories could be written down, and not everything recorded could survive for thousands of years. For this reason, the evolution of these legendary creatures highlights how myths and legends were passed down through many generations by verbal storytelling, a tradition that would keep versions of the ipotane alive, fluidly diverging and converging like a braided river.

Chapter 51: Tikbalang

Origin: Filipino Folklore

In the darkness of the forest, a traveler walked quietly and deliberately. He had navigated this route before and knew where he was going. Didn't he? He was becoming uncertain. The moon was a thin sliver and afforded little light. The trees all began to look the same, and he thought that maybe he had missed the fork in the path or misremembered how far it was. He kept walking, peering up into the canopy nervously at every rustle he heard. His grandmother had warned him to wear his shirt inside out, but he had scoffed at her old-fashioned tales. Now

though, he wasn't so sure, as the forest did seem to be playing tricks on him. Reaching a fork in the path, he went left but soon arrived in front of a balete tree he had definitely already seen tonight, its dangling air roots concealing hidden chambers. There was another rustle in the canopy, and a flurry of leaves floated down. Something was watching him.

Realizing that his grandmother's stories must be true after all, he stopped in his tracks. He quickly slipped off his shirt and pulled it back on inside out. He remembered something else she had told him and cleared his throat. 'Good evening,' he began aloud. 'I respectfully ask permission to cross your forest. Erm, please?' The trees rustled as if in reply, and the traveler ventured onwards. After a few minutes, he reached the same fork in the path again, although he could not explain how he got back to it by walking forwards. This time the moon shone a little brighter, and he recognized where he was and breathed a sigh of relief. It had worked. He could finally continue his journey safely without being misled by the Tikbalang. He whispered words of gratitude for his grandmother's advice and walked on.

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The Tikbalang is a phantom or spirit that dwells in the forests. It likes to play tricks on travelers, leading them astray by making them take the wrong path until they are hopelessly lost and disorientated. While the Tikbalang is playing its tricks, travelers cannot find their way back to their correct path, no matter how hard they try.

Traditionally, people both revered and feared the Tikbalang and carried talismans made from natural materials to ward against it. Other countermeasures included wearing your shirt inside out, asking for permission to pass through the forest, and treading quietly to not disturb the spirits. Despite their mischievousness, Tikbalangs are considered essentially benevolent and protect the forest from people who might harm it.

It is said that the Tikbalang can shape-shift into any appearance and choose to be invisible at will. In more modern tales, the Tikbalang is depicted as a humanoid creature with equine features. It is commonly shown as having equine lower legs and hooves, a humanoid torso, human arms and hands, and an equine head. It is covered in brown hair and has a thick black mane and sometimes a long horse's tail. However,

Tikbalangs are not in proportion, and their long legs cause their knees to be higher than their head when crouching down. They sit at the base of balete trees and wait for unsuspecting travelers to cross their path. Sometimes they are thought of as the spirit of the tree itself. According to folklore, it is possible to tame a Tikbalang.

In every Tikbalang's black mane, there are three golden strands of hair or three thick spikes. If a person is brave enough, they can leap onto the back of a Tikbalang and try to remove one of these golden strands or spines. The Tikbalang will object, and the would-be tamer needs a specially-prepared chord to survive the spirited ride. If the rider can stay on, the Tikbalang will eventually tire and admit defeat. If the rider removes one of the golden hairs or spikes and keeps it on their person, the Tikbalang will be forced to serve them. To prepare the chord, and because it represents a violation of nature, only magic-wielders would be likely to attempt this feat.

Early tales of the Tikbalang are no doubt ancient, and the evolution of its story mirrors the Philippines' historical changes through immigration and colonization. Before Spanish colonization in the 16th Century, there were no horses in the Philippines. So, before this time, Tikbalangs took a more ethereal form and were considered shape-shifting spirits. They were sometimes said to take the physical appearance of a friend or relative to better mislead their victim. There was a strong belief in animism in Filipino folklore, where natural entities have their own living spirit, and Tikbalangs were particularly associated with large old trees.

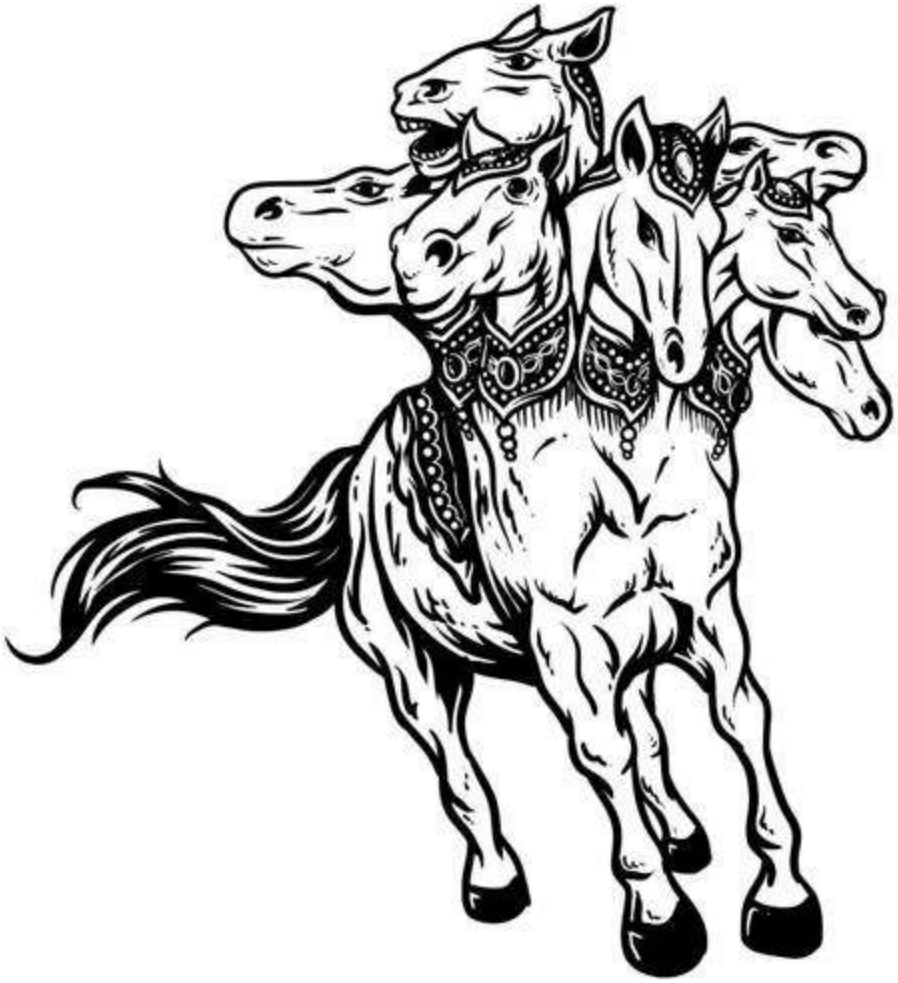
With immigration from India came Hindu influences to the physical appearance of the Tikbalang, from the deity Hayagriva, a horse-headed incarnation of the god Vishnu. Tales of Hayagriva certainly could have influenced the physical manifestation of the Tikbalang, even as the spirit remained largely unchanged.

The changing physical appearance of the Tikbalang over time reveals how migration and travel have influenced local myths and

legends, bringing together different cultures in the melting pot of tradition. While Tikbalang can be considered the embodiment of the forest, especially old balete trees, it also explains people getting unfathomably lost in the forest, even when they ostensibly know the way.

Chapter 52: Uchchaihshravas

Origin: Hindu Mythology



The ocean of milk was being churned, and it was finally starting to separate. Indra and the other gods looked out eagerly for any objects that might be forming in the froth. The item they were waiting for was an elixir to restore the strength and immortality of the gods. Indra pulled the churning rope, which was a colossal snake's tail, as hard as he could while bereft of his usual powers. The other gods, also in a weakened state, pulled the tail with him. The middle of the snake was wrapped around a mountain that turned as they pulled, whipping up swirling

white waves. At the head of the snake, pulled the demons. Back and forth the snake was heaved, spinning the mountain to churn up the milky seas.

Indra did not feel bad about tricking the demons into helping them. The gods had promised to share the ocean's bounty with the demons, including the elixir, but they had no intention of doing so. It was essential that only the gods drink the nectar of immortality to regain control of the universe; otherwise, everything would be lost to evil.

Something began to rise out of the foam, but it was not the elixir. It was a horse as white as the purest milk and as radiant as the moon. First, one head appeared, then another, until there were seven. The horse snorted and shook milky droplets from its body, and its many intelligent eyes took in the scene. The magnificent beast rose gracefully into the air, which itself seemed to glisten in adulation. All who saw the seven-headed horse, gods and demons alike, were transfixed by its splendor and desired it for their own. With great reluctance, Indra offered Uchchaihshravas, as a show of good faith, to the demons.

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A snow-white stallion with seven heads, Uchchaihshravas came into being when the ocean of milk was churned by the Devas, the deities, and the Asuras, the demons. The supreme deities Lord Vishnu, the preserver, and Lord Shiva, the destroyer, worked to ensure that the Devas prevailed in obtaining the elixir of immortality, the amrita, to regain control of the universe from the Asuras.

Uchchaihshravas was one of the fourteen treasures that separated from the milk, leaving only saltwater behind. Therefore, he is divine and immortal like the goddess Lakshmi, the amrita, and the wish-granting cow, among other fabulous treasures that were created at the same time. Some accounts say that Uchchaihshravas was initially given to the king of the Asuras. Despite this, Uchchaihshravas is most commonly known as the mount of Indra, the king of the Devas, although Indra also rode an elephant. With the ability of flight, Uchchaihshravas is also associated with the sun god's chariot.

Uchchaihshravas is considered the prototype and king of all horses. Traditional Hindu texts describe this stallion as divine, graceful, perpetually young, and a masterpiece of creation. He possessed such

irresistible vigor that even Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity, could not take her eyes off him and was overcome with admiration for her brother, as they were both born from the churning of the milk ocean. Lakshmi was so mesmerized by Uchchaihshravas that she unwittingly ignored Lord Vishnu's question to her, after which an offended Vishnu cursed her to take the appearance of a mare. Uchchaihshravas is also an innocent participant in another tale of strife.

A sage married two sisters Vinata, the mother of birds, and Kadru, the mother of snakes. Although they were sisters, they were endlessly jealous and constantly trying to best each other, and Kadru was particularly vindictive. One day, they heard that the miraculous seven-headed horse Uchchaihshravas would be nearby and immediately began to disagree about the nature of the horse. They argued in falsely polite language, for their bickering had bitter undertones.

Vinata knew Uchchaihshravas was pure white from the tips of its ears to the end of its tail. The scheming Kadru insisted that the horse was a radiant white but with a black tail. They made a bet, and whoever lost would become a slave to the other.

Kadru knew Vinata was right but could not resist the opportunity to have her sister under her command. Kadru told her many serpent sons to cover Uchchaihshravas's tail so it would appear as black as charcoal. Some of her sons refused to participate in this dishonest act, and Kadru cursed them—they would burn to death for disobeying her. The remaining serpent sons were very much afraid and did as their mother commanded to avoid being cursed. They covered Uchchaihshravas's tail so thoroughly that not a single white strand of tail hair could be seen.

When the two wives went to see Uchchaihshravas the following morning, Vinata was horrified to discover that she had lost the bet and was now bound as a slave to her sister Kadru. And Vinata would have to wait a long time for her freedom.

In Hinduism, horses are used to represent a force carrying another

force as they are vehicles of the gods. The name Uchchaihshravas combines uchchais, meaning ‘upwards’ or ‘from high above,’ and shravas, meaning ‘rushing stream.’ This conveys the idea of an uplifting or heavenly current for spiritual transformation. Like other white horses in mythology, Uchchaihshravas is also a symbol of purity and freedom.

Chapter 53: Nuckelavee

Origin: Scottish Folklore

The late winter sun rose slowly over the croft, gradually seeping through the clouds, spilling grey light over the fields. Margaret surveyed the morning as she pulled her boots on. It would rain before tea time. There was no grass to speak of at this time of year, so she wasn't surprised to see an empty field. The sheep occasionally went to eat seaweed, and once one decided to go to the beach, they all went.

Margaret opened a bale of hay, cutting the twine with her pocket knife. She hollered for the sheep while tossing the bale in sections, each leaf bouncing to release the scent of summer grasses and a hint of mold. But the sheep did not come, so Margaret walked the short distance to the coast, thinking that spring couldn't come soon enough.

Rounding the corner and stepping down onto the rocks, she covered her mouth and nose with her apron against the stench. It wasn't the sheep, although they were all dead, stretched out on the shingles as if they had fallen asleep and lost the desire to ever get up again. It was something else, something that had been dead for far longer. The loss of her whole flock was one thing, but the creature that stood amid them was something else. Even in the chill light of the morning, she clearly saw a horse and rider both without skin, just raw flesh, watching her. She could neither scream nor run, and she fought not to faint out of pure terror. Just as the fiery-eyed steed stepped towards her, the blessed heavens released a downpour, and the Nuckelavee disappeared back into the sea.

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The Nuckelavee, or Devil of the Sea, is a malevolent shapeshifting demon that personifies evil and harm. It originates in the Orkney Islands, with a unique folklore culture blending Celtic and Norse influences.

Its natural habitat is the sea, and while no one can say what shape the Nuckelavee takes in the water, on land, it takes the form of a horse with a legless rider fused onto its back. The horse has one blazing eye the color of fire, and the horse and rider both have oversized heads and wide mouths, spewing out noxious fumes that are poisonous to life. By this means, the Nuckelavee was blamed for wilting crops, sick livestock, and epidemics.

The Nuckelavee was also blamed for drought because it cannot withstand freshwater, including rain. Crossing a flowing stream is said to be the best way to escape its clutches. Sightings are often near the beach, such as the account provided by an Orkney farmer named Tammas:

Tammas was making his way home one clear starlit night. The road to his home lay between the sea and a deep freshwater loch. Suddenly, he saw a great creature coming towards him, but he had no way to

escape. He was sure turning his back on it would be a mistake, so he said a prayer and reluctantly kept walking forwards.

The beast was a one-eyed horse with a rider growing out of its back, and he recognized it as the terrible Nuckelavee. The rider had a large lolling head and no legs of its own but long arms that nearly trailed on the ground. The horse's mouth was as wide as a whale's and spewed its steamy noxious breath into the night air. Tammas was appalled to see the Nuckelavee had no skin at all, and as it got closer, he could see black blood coursing through yellow veins and its red muscles and white sinews moving as it walked towards him.

Tammas knew he could not jump into the loch, which had its own creatures, but he nearly fell in trying to avoid the grasp of the Nuckelavee's long arms. He accidentally kicked up freshwater, splashing the monster's legs, and it shied in response. This gave Tammas the chance to run, and he took it. Tammas ran for his life and threw himself across the stream at the end of the loch, knowing that the Nuckelavee would not be able to cross. When he looked up from the dirt on the other side, the stomping, snorting Nuckelavee had only his hat in its fist. The Nuckelavee left, and Tammas passed out in relief.

In Orkney, the water horse known as the Kelpie in many other parts of Scotland is called the Nuggle or Noggelvi. The similarities between the names, equine features, and evil natures indicate a shared origin. The unusual motif of a fused rider points to an outside influence, and several sources suggest Norse influences were added to the belief in the original Celtic water horse.

In fact, there is a little-known undead humanoid creature in Norse mythology with much in common with the Nuckelavee. The hideous Draugar, similar to a modern-day zombie, was thought to bring plagues and diseases and could wipe out whole herds of cattle, just like the Nuckelavee. The Drauger also had supernatural skills like shape-shifting and was accompanied by the stench of decay. To kill them, they had to be decapitated or burned and thrown into the sea. When Norsemen

settled in Orkney, it is possible that stories of the Drauger and the Nuggle have combined over time to form the Nuckelavee.

The Nuckelavee represented ultimate evil and was used to explain various negative occurrences, from unpredictable weather and crop failure to sick animals and human diseases.

Chapter 54: Longma

Origin: Chinese Mythology

He knew what the people said about him, and 'benevolent life-giver' was his favorite. 'Unpredictable' and 'destructive' he was not so fond of. And he thought 'greedy' was plain uncalled for. But the god of the Yellow River accepted that he had gotten a little carried away this time. With the autumn rains, his many tributaries had added generously to his boisterous currents. He had voraciously swallowed up the land, and it was difficult to see where the river turned into flood plain. It filled him with joy, all this magnificent, charging water, but his delight

was tempered by the misery of the people whose lands and homes he had flooded. The river was so wide in places that, looking across from the opposite bank, they could not tell the difference between horse and cow.

The people just needed to get organized, and the god of the Yellow River thought a few pointers should be sufficient. So he made a document; a fabulous map etched into a jade tablet, including instructions on how to control the flooding. He wanted well-directed ditches, not trinkets and equine sacrifices. When the people had implemented his designs, he wouldn't have to worry about enjoying the rains, and people would refer to him respectfully again. Calling his faithful dragon-horse to him, the god of the Yellow River fastened the jade tablet onto its scaled back as it nudged him affectionately with its whiskery face. It was adept at finding worthy individuals to deliver sacred objects to, and he admired it fondly as it swam off with the current. Longma, the dragon-horse, always knew just what to do.

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Longma literally translates to 'dragon-horse' and is also a term used for a wise and eminent person. This is particularly relevant because Longma was considered a symbol of virtuous leadership. In ancient China, horses up to a certain height were called ma, but the tallest of horses were called long, or dragons. Horses were said to be related to dragons, and as such, both had a strong association with water, particularly rivers.

Dwelling within the Yellow River, Longma had the shape of a horse but was covered all over in blue and red scales. It had oriental dragon facial features such as whiskers, pointed teeth, and a short horn protruding from the top of its head. Although Longma is occasionally depicted with a dragon's tail, it is more usually a swirling horse's tail. Longma had an upwards flowing mane like a dragon and a melodious neigh like the sound of a flute. Some accounts also give Longma feathery wings of various sizes, but with or without wings, Longma could travel in the water or sail through the air, covering hundreds of miles with ease. Longma could also walk on water if it chose to, without its hooves breaking the surface. Longma was considered a good omen that appeared only during the reign of an honorable ruler:

Emperor Yao had been on the throne for seventy years and felt it was time to resign and that Shun would make a great predecessor. Thanks to Shun, the floodwaters had been assuaged, and Emperor Yao would be eternally grateful. But he needed divine approval, so Emperor Yao had prepared a ceremony on the banks of the Yellow River. The shrine was built, the wise men consulted, and now they waited for the time between light and dark.

As twilight approached, the river began to shine, and beautiful swirling mists rose from the water, caught by the breeze. From out of the water stepped a dragon-horse, blessing them with its presence. It carried green, scaled body armor in its mouth, shaped like the broad shell of a tortoise and striped with dark red. The dragon-horse walked majestically up to the shrine, gently placed the armor upon it, and then walked away, disappearing back into the river. When Emperor Yao approached the armor, he saw a message coated in yellow gold, encrusted with white and green gems, and tied with a green thread. When he opened it, he saw that his heart's desire had been given the blessing of heaven, for it read, "With pleased countenance given to Emperor Shun." Emperor Yao could retire to a worthy successor with divine approval.

The ancestors of the traditional population of the Yellow River Valley afforded horses great importance as they were essential to their nomadic way of life. They even considered horses to be divine, like their close relatives, the dragons. In Chinese mythology, horses represent freedom, strength, and beauty, while the dragon is an auspicious symbol of power and vitality. Combined, the dragon-horse symbolizes a strong, vigorous spirit, representing freedom and divine blessing. Longma has both horse and dragon features because its mother was a mare and its father was a dragon that resided in a river. When the mare went to the river to bathe, it became pregnant by drinking the river water.

Seeing Longma was considered a good omen because it only appeared when a virtuous ruler was on the throne. A sighting foretold the appearance of legendary cultural heroes, the Three Kings and the Five Emperors, such as Emperor Yao and Emperor Shun. Longma is

most renowned for delivering the Yellow River Map and the mystical Trigrams used for divination into the hands of the worthy.

Representing freedom, power, and vitality, Longma is a symbol of imperial authority, lending divine approval to just rulers.

Chapter 55: Abada

Origin: kongo folklore

No one came here unless they were banished or crazy. Filipe hadn't been banished, but he was beginning to think he was crazy, trailing through these inhospitable mountains. Suddenly, the expedition leader dropped onto her belly and signaled to Filipe, flapping her hand up and down. He did as she had and crawled along on his stomach as quietly as he could over the rocks, wondering what had caught her attention. When he arrived at the leader's side, he saw they were at the edge of a cliff. He had been so absorbed in his thoughts he hadn't even seen it

coming.

Spreading out not far below them was a green valley, and in the bottom, a herd of wild horses was grazing, with the occasional foal gamboling about. But as Filipe looked closer, he saw that they weren't horses at all. Their striped hindquarters were a different shape, and they had mostly hairless tails and short manes. As a cloud moved away from the sun, he noticed they were all chocolaty-brown with white lower legs and cloven hooves. A foal that had caught his eye turned to look straight up at him. With a sharp intake of breath, Filipe saw that it had a single cream-colored horn on its forehead. His heart raced, and he scanned the other creatures. Most had two small dark horns side-by-side, but scattered amongst the herd were several individuals with a single central horn. They had found the fabled valley of the unicorns.

***

There are many conflicting reports of the Abada, and little of the original oral traditions from which it sprang are recorded. When European explorers first traveled through Africa, many had heard rumors of what they called the African Unicorn. There are multiple accounts of sightings, although some are clearly confused with other animals, which were novel at the time.

In A Short Relation of the River Nile, the author explains that what other European writers were calling Abada was certainly the rhinoceros. The confusion seems to have been widespread, and even a rhinoceros given to the King of Portugal, Sebastian I, was named Abada. Marco Polo wrote about how the Abada was not at all what he was expecting when he saw a dark thick-set beast with crooked horns on its nose when he was expecting a graceful unicorn.

But some testimonies are clearly about a different type of animal.

An experienced and respected Portuguese Captain was traveling in the company of twenty soldiers. One morning, they stopped to have breakfast in a small valley where the grass was ample for their horses, though it was surrounded by thick forest. The soldiers set their horses to graze and had just sat down when out from the densest part of the trees lightly sprang an extraordinary creature. It was the shape of a horse,

dark brown in color, with a short, thin tail and mane, which were both black. On its forehead was a single, long, light-colored horn of superb beauty.

The creature bounded quickly and frivolously into their midst and didn't seem to notice the company until it was right among them. Then, with eyes full of fear, it ran about to make its escape. The horses were untroubled by it, and the spectators had time to admire its beautiful straight horn and were delighted with it.

The creature was in close range, but the muskets were not ready, so several soldiers tried to capture it. They recognized that it was the famous unicorn they had often heard about. But it evaded them and careered violently around them and back into the forest. The soldiers were disappointed to lose their prize but satisfied that the stories of the unicorn were true.

The modern conception of the Abada has two crooked horns side-by-side on its forehead. This seems to be adopted from the mistaken rhinoceros sightings with 'two crooked horns' interpreted as side-by-side instead of one above the other. Rhinoceros horns were attributed with special medicinal powers, something else ascribed to the Abada. Available sources point towards the original folktales of the Abada having a single horn, which is why many referred to it as a unicorn.

While traveling through Africa, a Scottish explorer, William Balfour Baikie, had heard many native stories of a single-horned unicorn-type creature. He documented its many names in the countries through which he had traveled, Agába being one of those names. Baikie was initially skeptical of the stories but helpfully explains that the words he lists are distinct from the local terms used for the rhinoceros.

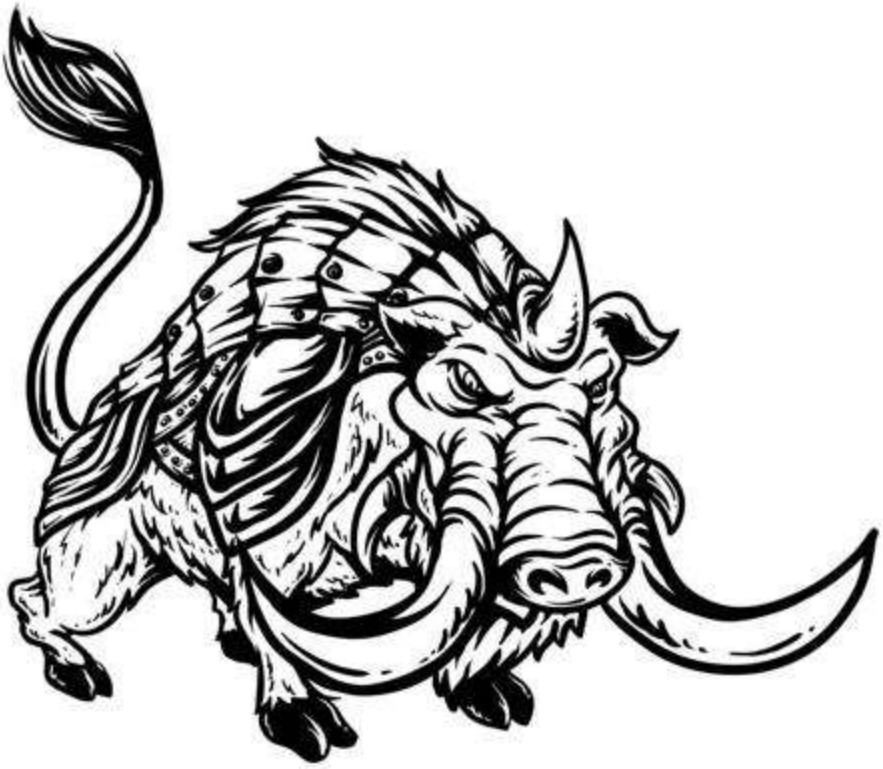
Other sources that seem to agree, and are not referring to the rhinoceros, describe a creature of rich reddish-brown color, sometimes with stripes, like a small and agile horse with cloven hooves. Its tail is described as similar to a wild boar's tail, thin and fleshy ending in a tuft

of hair. It has a slender, straight horn on its forehead.

There is another creature that was consistently called the African Unicorn. Deep in the forests of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, there is a rare and secretive animal with two horn-like protrusions on its forehead. The okapi, or forest giraffe, is an excellent match in terms of physical appearance, including color, stature, and countenance. They are so elusive they were only photographed in the wild relatively recently. However, their two horns are only short, so the mystery of the Abada continues.

Chapter 56: The Erymanthian boar

Origin: GREEK MYTHOLOGY



The rich earth was freshly turned but not by any plow. Jelena surveyed the destroyed field in dismay as a sick feeling crept into the pit of her stomach. She uttered a curse under her breath as she wandered down the field. The crops were uprooted and eaten, and discarded sugar beet leaves were strewn across the ground and trampled into the mud by cloven hoof prints. Looking closer, the hoof prints were larger than any wild pig Jelena had ever seen, and no deer or cow could do this much damage. She was beyond aggravated about the loss of the beet crop; it was

going to be lean times. Walking to the edge of the field, she looked despondently into the woods.

About to turn for home, a crashing sound came through the undergrowth towards her, accompanied by several rough snorts. To her dismay, it was a giant wild boar rushing straight at her. There was no time to flee for home, so she desperately scrambled up into the boughs of the nearest tree. The boar seemed mad with fury, thrashing its head around, and Jelena saw the broken shaft of an arrow jutting out of its flank. She took in its colossal size and bloodstained pelt and unwillingly felt a pang of pity for it, contrasting with her own feelings of anger that this creature had mangled her entire crop. Jelena had nothing with which to put the giant boar out of its misery, so she stayed up the tree, watching it. It looked just like the Erymanthian Boar.

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Classical descriptions of the Erymanthian Boar say that it resided in the mountains of Greece, usually Mount Erymanthos, beside marshes and cypress trees. It would terrorize local groves and destroy the surrounding farmland. It was described as large and exceptionally heavy with a shaggy pelt, foaming jaws, and an untamable nature.

Mount Erymanthos, in Western Greece, was once considered a sacred mountain of Artemis, the Greek goddess of the hunt and wild animals. People believed that when she was angry or affronted, she would send a raging boar down from the mountain to destroy the land. In this way, wild boars represented part of Artemis' nature because she was seen as capable of sudden vengeance and destruction.

Boars were common in Ancient Greece, and they would often raid farmland, destroying crops. They were sought-after for meat but were not easy to hunt. They were also unpredictable and violent when injured, earning them a ferocious reputation as people frequently had negative dealings with them. In ancient Greek art, this reputation of strength, courage, and ferocity is exemplified in multiple vase paintings, reliefs, and even coins. Depictions show boars as very muscular and with a vicious look.

This reputation made them suitable opponents for heroes and brave hunters, and for this reason, there are several myths involving boars in Greek mythology. The Erymanthian Boar is the most renowned as it was

one of Hercules’ twelve labors.

The Greek demigod Hercules was on his way to complete another labor; it was the fourth seemingly impossible challenge he had been set. This time, King Eurystheus had requested that the Erymanthian Boar be brought to him—alive. When Hercules reached Mount Erymanthos, where the beast lived, he sought it out. It was easy enough to find because of the amount of noise it made as it snorted and rooted around looking for food. Hercules frightened the beast down the mountainside with a mighty shout. It crashed through thickets and snowdrifts with Hercules in pursuit, never losing sight of it. It was bigger than any common boar, with fearsome sharp tusks in its foaming jaws. It tried to take cover in a coppice, but Hercules threw his spear in after it, injuring it. The boar ran until it was too exhausted to go any further. Hercules then captured it, bound it tightly, and slung the huge beast across his shoulders. It struggled infrequently, and its blood dripped down Hercules’s back as he carried it all the way back to King Eurystheus’s court in Mycenae. Everyone came out to see such a creature, and they were captivated by its ferocious appearance and applauded Hercules enthusiastically. When King Eurystheus saw Hercules carrying the Erymanthian Boar, the very animal he thought was impossible to subdue, he promptly hid in a large bronze jar, too terrified to set eyes upon the beast for a moment longer. He would have to think of something even more difficult and dangerous for Hercules’s next labor.

When left alone, wild boars are sociable creatures that are naturally shy of humans, and they are surprisingly light on their feet. They can do a lot of damage to farmland, but this is while rooting for food rather than manically charging about. However, if surprised, injured, or cornered, they are unpredictable and dangerous because of their sheer strength and sharp tusks, and mothers with young are particularly unyielding. Because boars are stocky, robust, and notoriously difficult to kill, this was interpreted as courage in ancient times. The fierceness they have been attributed with correctly represents the dangers of hunting wild boar.

It was only fitting that the Erymanthian Boar that Hercules was sent to obtain was an enormous and ferocious specimen. Representing strength, ferocity, and courage, as well as the vengeful capacity of the gods, wild boars made suitable opponents for hunters and heroes alike in ancient Greece and beyond.

Chapter 57: Indrik

Origin: Slavic Folklore

A long time ago, in a distant land, there was a royal orchard. From sea to sea, there was no other place like it, and the monarch was very proud of the beautiful fruit trees. Grigory was on sentry duty, the night watch, to ensure the royal family's best-loved trees would be preserved and fruitful. Birds were known to steal the fruit, given the opportunity, day or night. Fighting sleep, Grigory was roused by the sound of wood cracking and breaking. He looked down from the walls and saw a fearfully large deer rubbing its antlers against the bark of the grandest

apple tree, snapping branches as it did so. Grigory knew he would surely be punished for this damage. In fear of his life, never mind his job, he leaped down from his post and into the orchard, breaking into a run as soon as his boots struck the soft ground.

The deer was so large and muscular that it almost reminded Grigory of a bull, only it was far more graceful. It appeared mildly startled by Grigory's approach and pronged across the grass with unbelievable speed, a single bound covering a phenomenal distance. Grigory raced to follow it, his heart pounding, and was shocked when it suddenly disappeared into the earth. When Grigory reached the same spot, he came across a pit that had never been there before. Knowing there was little choice, Grigory jumped down into the hole after the giant deer. He fell and fell until he landed at the bottom of a deep crevasse. Finally regaining consciousness, Grigory found himself in a mysteriously lit subterranean world. He looked around and saw the giant deer regarding him, a horn between its intelligent eyes. It could only be Indrik, and that meant he had tumbled into the underworld.

***

Indrik is a beast from Russian folklore that is sometimes compared to a unicorn, although it can have one horn or two depending on the story and is given a more rugged appearance than a modern unicorn. The name Indrik is thought to be a distortion of the Russian word for unicorn, yedinorog, perhaps implying a single or at least a central horn. But while sources agree that Indrik is a horned creature, there is little agreement about the number or placement of any horns. Some suggest a horn or two on the nose like a rhinoceros, others a single horn on the forehead, or two next to the ears. Antlers are an addition based on the deer-like descriptions of the creature. It is described as having a horse's head, the body of a bull, and a deer's legs. This means Indrik is either a chimera, a mixture of creatures, or the descriptions are illustrative rather than literal, describing a gigantic deer with a more equine than bovine head and a large muscular body reminiscent of a bull. The second approach seems more credible because the parts mentioned are not incongruous like a typical chimera and are from similar animals.

In Russian fairy tales, Indrik is portrayed as an opponent of an evil serpent. In other stories, Indrik takes golden apples from the royal grove instead of the more standard version of the Firebird stealing the fruit. Often, a hero will venture into the underworld on a quest to find Indrik

to make him his magical steed. The story of golden fruit, a trip to the underworld, and a magical ride has clear Persian influences from strikingly similar folktales. The idea of Indrik being the father and ruler of all animals also has Persian roots where all natural entities were assigned to kingdoms with corresponding chieftains.

Indrik is described as the father of all beasts in the Book of Doves, a spiritual verse from medieval Russia.

Indrik is the father of all beasts and the king of all animals. He lives in the Holy Mountain, where he eats and drinks, and where no other foot may tread. Stone mountains cannot hold him as he moves through another realm with his horn. As regularly as the sun moves across the sky, so he walks at will throughout the underworld. The streams that come rushing out of the mountains all belong to him. He ensures the underground channels and gullies bubble up as springs that fill the rivers and lakes. When he stirs, the ground trembles, and he rises up out of the damp earth. Wherever he turns, wherever he goes, below land or above, no harm comes to those animals who worship him. And all animals revere him, as Indrik is the beast of all beasts.

Depicted as the ruler of all animals, Indrik lives underground in an otherworldly place. He has life-giving associations by being the father of all animals, or the mother of all animals in some older versions, and being linked to nourishing water. Indrik also symbolizes mystical protection for the animals that worship him. He is neither malevolent nor harmless. Indrik does not seek to cause harm but can make a formidable ally to various heroes, helping them with their quests.

Indrik has captured the imaginations of gamers via the Elder Scrolls, where an array of glorious and magical deer-like ‘Indriks’ have been created with iridescent antlers and a single horn on their foreheads. They also have a deep-rooted connection with the earth, can walk between worlds, and are just as mysterious and majestic as the Russian Indrik they take their inspiration from.

Section Six | Aquatic Beasts

It is easy to picture ancient people looking out to sea and wondering what lurks in the unknown depths. Many sea monsters were imagined to explain the dangers of the deep, the sinking of boats, lost sailors, and certain natural phenomena such as tidal waves and tsunamis.

Unpredictable and deadly like the sea, two of the most well-known sea monsters are the Kraken, a giant many-tentacled creature from Scandinavian folklore, and the more whale-like Leviathan from the Hebrew Bible. It was so renowned that the word leviathan was incorporated into the English language as a noun meaning something very large or powerful.

This section includes creatures that live in bodies of water. Some are amphibious, like the Māori Ponaturi, while others shapeshift to come onto land. The myriad water-dwelling creatures almost universally represent the risk of death by drowning and the idea that there could be something hidden just under the surface. This concept is also said to symbolize the unconscious mind, always present but usually hidden; a monk lusting after the Slavic Rusalka is an excellent example of this.

A body of water does not need to be vast to be dangerous; lakes and rivers can easily lead to drowning, as shown with the Scottish Kelpie. Crocodiles also represent a hidden threat in the water in certain countries and have inspired creatures like Makara in Hindu mythology.

As well as deadly, the sea can be giving and beautiful, like the seal-like selkie folk of Scotland, a heart-breaking exception to the theme of physical peril and destruction posed by other water dwellers.

Chapter 58: Bake-kujira

Origin: Japanese Mythology

Hamma sat on her rocky coastal perch and gazed down at the shallow water of the cove. She looked out to sea and envisioned her father going whaling, dressed in his loincloth and

headband. As far as Hamma was concerned, he was fearless and the best swimmer in the village, but that didn't stop her from worrying about him. Returning her gaze to the cove, Hamma saw the splashes of a shoal coming in. Great! she thought, jumping up, preparing to tell her father—they could have fish for dinner! But before she turned away, she saw a large shape under the water; perhaps a whale was following the fish. She ran down the rocky path to the edge of the peninsula to get a closer look.

Sure enough, just below the water's surface was a huge white whale swimming towards the cove. Not only were there fish in front of it but also birds above it, tagging along for a feast. Her stomach rumbled just thinking about it. She would tell her father there was a whale too—everyone could eat well! Just then, the whale came up to breathe, and she squinted to check what she saw: the whale was all bones, with only seawater in between them. Yōkai! Maybe the shoal of fish would be strange like the birds and no good to eat, like the whale, her hopes of a good meal disintegrated. She raced to tell her father. He would know if they should go to the shrine to pray because she had seen Bake-kujira.

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The skeletal form of Bake-kujira has no flesh or structure other than white bones, although the creature is animated and moves around like it is alive, even coming up to the surface as if to breathe. Its skull hosts empty eye sockets and, as it is a baleen whale, no teeth. It is said to be accompanied by peculiar fish and birds, no doubt because whales and birds can be witnessed following large shoals of fish for a feeding frenzy in shallow water. While whale carcasses are known to float for a time, they sink as decay sets in, rotting to bones on the seafloor—this implies that other forces are at work in the case of Bake-kujira. Translated from Japanese, Bake-kujira means 'ghost whale,' although it is sometimes called 'bone whale.'

The popularity of Bake-kujira can be credited to the manga artist Mizuki Shigeru. He was considered a master in the genre of *yōkai* stories and was best known for the manga series *GeGeGe no Kitarō*, which featured Bake-kujira. He was also an expert historian and was inspired by Bake-kujira folklore from his home region.

One rainy evening, an enormous whale was seen from the shore. The men took their fishing boat out to investigate, but the closer they got, the more unusual the situation became. Even though it was difficult to see in the rain and encroaching darkness, the whale was clearly humongous and white. Surrounding the whale were thousands of fish, but even the most experienced fishermen could not recognize them. There were also birds accompanying the whale that no one had ever seen before. It was as if they had sailed into an unknown world.

One man threw a harpoon at the whale, but it went straight through. The whale had no flesh; it was only bones but was swimming nonetheless. The men were unanimously terrified and called off the hunt. The whale turned and swam back out to the deep ocean, the strange birds and fish going with it. The whalers returned to shore, safe but shaken, convinced they must have seen a strange god or the ghost of a whale they had once killed. And though they looked, they never saw it again.

Historically, whale sightings and beached whales were considered an auspicious blessing as they could mean the difference between starvation and prosperity. This led to the traditional saying, 'One whale benefits seven villages.' In ancient Japan, whales were respected and eventually considered the embodiment of Ebisu, the god of abundance, so the limited remains of carcasses were buried in whale mounds and often turned into shrines.

During the Great Tenpo Famine, in 1837, a large whale beached itself next to the whale shrine in the town of Akehama; it saved the whole area from starvation. This was seen as a noble sacrifice, so the whale was given a posthumous Buddhist name as a mark of veneration, a practice usually reserved only for great lords. The name given roughly translates to 'The Great Health-Bringing Whale Scholar of the Universe.'

Modern commentators tend to present the symbolism of Bake-kujira as the antithesis of traditional whaling, so instead of representing food, stability, and prosperity, Bake-kujira is a bad omen for famine, fires, or

plagues. Historically, rumors like this were perpetuated by people opposed to whaling, such as Buddhists, to dissuade people from killing these majestic mammals. However, Mizuki Shigeru, perhaps the most direct link to the legend, portrays Bake-kujira differently. In *GeGeGe no Kitarō*, Bake-kujira is depicted as a sea guardian, massive and powerful but kind-natured.

Some sources mention the 'Curse of Bake-kujira,' but this seems to be a term coined by Mizuki Shigeru himself in the 1950s. While working on manga, he said he ate a lot of whale meat and became inexplicably ill; he called it the 'Curse of Bake-kujira.' Thus, the term seems to have been transposed to a time when fishermen were almost certainly worried that the souls of slaughtered whales would become vengeful and return to bring destruction. Ultimately, this is why Bake-kujira has been interpreted as both a scourge-bringer and a protector of the oceans.

Chapter 59: Kelpie

Origin: Scottish Folklore

One evening, a man walking home saw that the river he needed to cross was flooded and too fast-moving for him to do so safely. As he was about to turn around, he saw a gray pony

grazing on the river bank. The man approached it; it made no objections to his presence and allowed him to jump up onto its back. He was a confident rider and had quickly decided that this was the perfect way to cross the river and return to his family as planned. However, as soon as he was seated, the horse charged off into the deepest and most turbulent part of the river. By the time the man realized, it was too late: this was no horse; it was a kelpie taking him to his death.

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The most common water spirit in Scottish folklore is the kelpie, a type of water horse. It is a shapeshifting aquatic creature that can take the form of a horse or human on land. Kelpies usually show themselves as handsome grey or black horses and possess exceptional strength and stamina. They lurk around bodies of water, usually rivers, that have deep pools for them to inhabit. Their coats are enchanted, so if you touch them, you cannot break free. The most likely candidate for the word origin of kelpie is the Gaelic word *cailpeach*, meaning 'colt,' a young male horse.

Almost every significant body of water in Scotland has an associated kelpie story, and the common theme is that if you get onto their back, you are doomed to drown. The variety of local stories imply a host of different kelpies with a wide range of personalities and characteristics. Some regional variations include a kelpie with serpents in its mane, some with hooves pointing the wrong way, and one that sings to entice you onto its back. It is said you should look out for a dripping wet mane or water weeds in the hair of a kelpie disguised as a person. Kelpies are almost always considered malevolent and said to prey on humans, leaving only entrails thrown out onto the riverbank

Across Scotland, a tale is told of ten children who unknowingly met a kelpie as they played near a river. Nine of the children climbed onto its back, but the tenth child, a boy, was reluctant. The kelpie wanted all ten children and followed the boy. The young boy, thinking the horse was being friendly, stretched out his arm to gingerly stroke the horse's nose. Immediately his finger became stuck and, as the horse turned, dragging

him towards the river with the other children still on its back, he knew it was a kelpie. Shouting to the other children, he quickly took his pocket knife and cut off his own finger to free himself. The other nine children were stuck on the kelpie's back and couldn't get off; they were carried away and drowned, their innards later found on the riverbank.

In contrast to this malicious intent, kelpies are also seen as seeking human companionship, but in most cases, it is probably a pretense to lure people onto their backs to drown them. However, one story shows at least some kelpies are capable of human-like feelings.

There was once a lonely kelpie who had seen a girl he longed to marry. He turned himself into a handsome young man to woo her. The girl, however, recognized him for a kelpie and took his silver necklace while he was sleeping; it was his bridle and the source of his power. Without it, he was forced into his horse shape and put to work on the family farm for a year. Questioning her actions, the young woman took the kelpie to see a wise man. He said she should return the kelpie's silver necklace, which she did, allowing him to resume his human form once more. He professed that he still wanted to marry her, and this time she agreed. The wise man granted the kelpie a mortal life, and they were married.

Gaining control over a kelpie and putting their strength to work does not always have a happy outcome. For example, the Laird of Morphie forced a kelpie to build his home by making it wear a halter with a cross on it. When the Laird's home was finished, he set the kelpie free, but it cursed him, and the Morphie family line died out.

Also related to tack, an ancestor of the MacGreggor clan managed to take a kelpie's bridle. Powerless and destined to die within a day without its bridle, the kelpie tried to reclaim it but was outsmarted by MacGregor. Subsequently, the bridle was said to give healing properties to water and was passed down as a family heirloom.

While kelpies in human form are almost always male, in one story, a kelpie appeared as a disgruntled old woman and drowned two people in

a river. Despite this, most paintings of kelpies show them as nude waterside maidens, clearly a sizable step away from the catalog of traditional folklore.

The kelpie stories warn people of the danger of flooded rivers, deep pools, and hidden currents. These all present a genuine risk of drowning, and the stories may have originated as an attempt to rationalize both children and adults lost to such tragic accidents. Evolving into cautionary tales, they may have helped keep children away from dangerous waters, as well as young women away from handsome strangers.

Chapter 60: Selkie

Origin: Celtic, Scottish and Norse Folklore

She had looked inside every cupboard, under the beds, in the roof space, any crevices she could think of; it was nowhere to be found. But it must be somewhere! It was too precious to

have been thrown away. And it couldn't have been destroyed; she was still here, wasn't she? She sat down dejected. Life was alright here; her husband was a kind man, and she had come to love him, but…

'What were you looking for, Ma'am?' asked her youngest as she sidled up next to her lap.

'I used to have a coat that was, you know… warm for winter,' said the mother sadly, stroking her daughter's hair, 'but I can't find it anywhere.' The child thought for a moment, 'Is it shiny and beautiful?' she asked. Her mother nodded. 'Don't cry, I know where it is!' and the child dashed off into the next room. 'Is it this one, Ma'am?' she asked, returning a few minutes later with a silky smooth, grey sealskin coat. Her mother gasped, 'yes, where did you find it after all this time?'

'I saw Dad putting it under the floorboards one night,' said the child, proffering it to her mother. She took it like it was a treasure and held it to her chest. Putting a gentle hand on her daughter's shoulder, she said, 'I have to go away, tell your Dad and brothers, I love you all, but I have to go.' She got up, clasping her sealskin coat, and headed for the door.

'When are you coming back?' asked the child, misunderstanding.

'Come and visit me at the beach sometimes,' the selkie said over her shoulder, 'I will sing for you.' And with tears rolling down her cheeks, she turned and left.

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Tales of the selkie folk, or seal people, stretch from Ireland to Iceland and are concentrated around the Northern Isles of Scotland, Orkney and Shetland. Selkies are miraculous seals, male and female, that can shed their sealskin to take human form on land. They are beautiful, loving creatures with little to no inclination to cause harm. Selkie is the Orcadian word for gray seal, a common sight in the area, basking on rocks, or popping their heads out of the water, with big dark eyes.

In folklore, selkies cannot shed their skin any time they please, only according to certain time constraints, such as once a month, once a year, or every seven years. They must don their sealskin to return to the sea; otherwise, they are forced to stay on land. Regardless of how long they stay ashore, selkies have a deep attachment to the sea. Selkie folklore revolves around a human taking a selkie lover, but it inevitably results in heartbreak as the selkie can't escape their urge to return to the water.

If a lonely human woman seeks the company of a selkie man, she must shed seven tears into the sea at high tide to call a selkie to her. Stories of taking a male selkie lover may have been used to explain pregnancies while protecting the true father's identity, relevant in the small island communities where everyone knows everyone else. For female selkies, the stories may have originated to explain a missing wife and comfort any children left behind.

In Orkney, there was once a handsome young man who was yet to marry, even though the local girls had tried to woo him. One evening he was walking by the beach when he saw several selkies in human form frolicking in the shallows and dancing naked on the shore. He crept closer; he had heard of selkies but never seen them on land before. When they saw him, they snatched up their sealskins and fled to the water. But the last selkie woman was too slow; the young man had snatched up her skin before her. She begged for him to return it, but he could not bear the thought of her disappearing into the sea; such was her loveliness. He folded up the sealskin and took it—and its owner—home.

They made a happy life together and had several children, but he often saw his selkie wife gazing out to sea with a wistful look in her eye. He could not bear the thought of parting with her and made sure the sealskin was well hidden. However, their children found it one day, and not knowing what it was, gave it to their mother. Once the selkie had the skin in her possession, she returned to the sea, leaving her children and human husband behind, never to be seen again, although the children often saw a seal pop their head up and watch them intently every once in a while.

An interesting candidate for the origin of selkie folklore is Sami kayakers, indigenous people from Scandinavia, or even Inuit who rowed down to Scotland when the ice sheets made the distances more traversable. Their garments and kayaks were covered in sealskin, but as they became waterlogged, they had to be removed and dried out to regain buoyancy. This could have easily given the impression of removing a sealskin to reveal human legs and also given rise to the idea that some selkies were already married.

For these isolated coastal communities, the sea both gives and takes away. To reflect this, selkies symbolize a generous bounty and the heartache of loss. In contrast to other sea-dwelling mythical creatures, selkies are affectionate and gentle, just like the companionable sight of gray seals. So, the next smooth dark head that bobs up out of northern waters may be a missing selkie wife and mother, checking on her family.

Chapter 61: Cetus

Origin: Greek Mythology

A tidal wave had just swept over the land, flattening almost everything in its wake, ripping up trees with ease, and tumbling buildings. From a high vantage point, Makda could see the sea still churning; what looked like a second wave rising up, ready to roll ashore. There was

something out there, writing in the sea, and every so often, a large black tail would flick up and crash down, violently disturbing the water. The wave started to rush in towards where the beach used to be. Makda could only look on in horror; there were already so many bodies floating in the water, cows, people.

There was definitely a twisting black shape behind the wave, closer now, urging it on. A long black head rose out of the water to oversee the destruction; it was as if it used its massive body to drive the tidal wave ashore. Big bulging eyes and rows of razor-sharp teeth were visible —it seemed to be cackling at the havoc it heralded. From its vastness, viciousness, and unusual spines down its back, it could only be Cetus.

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In Greek mythology, the name Cetus can be given to any large sea monster, and collectively they were called Cetea. Cetus was also the Greek word for any large sea animal, including whales and sharks. A classification of whales, cetaceans, is named after Cetea, and they are also large, fully aquatic, streamlined, and carnivorous.

Of exceptional strength and size, Cetea are said to have had an insatiable appetite, attributed to their vastness, and to be quick to rage. Cetea were loyal to the sea god Poseidon and frolicked around his chariot when he passed by. They were also the mounts and companions of the beautiful sea nymphs, Nereids, but savage Cetea attacks are the most renowned.

The most well-known Cetea were the Ethiopian Cetus, slain by Perseus, and the Trojan Cetus, slain by Hercules. In each case, the Cetus in question was sent by Poseidon to consume a human sacrifice.

Written accounts featuring Cetea focus on the courageous actions of the heroes rather than describing the sea monsters in detail; however, ancient art can provide insight here. Depictions in 4th – 6th Century BC vase paintings show Cetea with long jaws full of sharp teeth, a long

body with fins, and a row of spikes down the back of their neck or whole body. The surviving vase painting of the Ethiopian Cetus appears more serpent-like, whereas the example of the Trojan Cetus is reminiscent of an elongated killer whale.

The myth featuring the Ethiopian Cetus is the most well known because it tells how the hero Perseus met his wife, Andromeda:

In ancient Ethiopia, King Cepheus and Queen Cassiopeia had a beautiful daughter, Princess Andromeda. They were very proud of her, but the queen, in particular, liked to boast about how stunning the princess was. One day Queen Cassiopeia was crowing about how her daughter was even more beautiful than the Nereids when the sea nymphs overheard her. Enraged and offended, the sea nymphs rushed to Poseidon to complain and demand that Queen Cassiopeia be punished for her pride and arrogance. Poseidon agreed that something must be done—he was married to a Nereid after all—and he sent a mighty tidal wave to Ethiopia. The wave alone caused much destruction, but into the floods it had created, Poseidon sent Cetus to devastate the kingdom further. Many lives were lost, and homes and farmland were obliterated.

King Cepheus consulted with an oracle for advice on how to stop this onslaught. The oracle advised him to sacrifice Princess Andromeda to the sea monster to appease Poseidon. The King felt he had little choice and ordered for his daughter to be tied to a rock in the sea; then, they waited for Cetus.

Luckily, at that time, the hero Perseus was on his way home from killing the Gorgon Medusa. As he flew over the sea with his winged sandals and reached the coast of Ethiopia, he saw the beautiful Andromeda chained to a rock. He spoke with her and was moved by her plight, so he quickly sought agreement from her parents that he could marry her if he saved her from Cetus. They hastily agreed, even though she had been betrothed to the King's brother. At that moment, Cetus came, thrashing wildly through the water, snapping his sharp fangs,

ready to devour his sacrifice.

In some accounts, Perseus slew the monstrous Cetus with his sword, and in others, he used Medusa's head to turn Cetus to stone. Either way, he destroyed a monster and gained a bride, and Perseus and Andromeda went on to have one of the most trouble-free marriages in Greek mythology.

Thus, Cetus is established as a tool used by the tempestuous sea god Poseidon to dish out his destructive punishments. In the story of the Trojan Cetus, Hercules rescues Hesione, another princess and would-be human sacrifice. Both Greek myths involving Cetus have the classic damsel in distress, with Cetus as the threat to life to be overcome by a daring (male) hero, which reflects the patriarchal society of the era.

Collectively, Cetea represent the dangers of creatures such as whales and sharks while symbolizing the then unknown depths and destructive powers of the ocean.

Chapter 62: Makara

Origin: Hindu Mythology

Under the timid surface of the river, the creature lurked. It was patient, calculating, and hungry. Its long jaws itched to sink their sharp teeth into flesh. Completely submerged, no one would know it was there until it was too late. It took a slow step forward along the riverbed,

each clawed foot sinking into soft mud. There were splashes as legs got into the river, some stood still, some were cavorting around, and distorted playful shouts travelled through ripples. A line of soapy suds floated overhead from clothes being washed. Any moment, some unsuspecting innocent would step closer, and Makara would gorge on fresh meat.

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Makara is the Sanskrit word for 'sea creature' and the origin of the English word 'mugger,' which is also Hindi for crocodile, reflecting how crocodiles hunt. The gharial, one of the types of crocodiles found in the river Ganges, is the likely source of inspiration for Makara because it has an unusually shaped snout, having a lumpy protrusion at the end of its nose.

Makara is a hybrid creature composed of animals representing air, fire, water, and earth to embody creativity. It is most often depicted with a fish or dolphin-like body, the front paws of a lion, and long crocodile jaws ending in a short elephant's trunk, curled upwards. The tail is either fish or peacock-like. Religious sculptors add that Makara should have the ears of a pig and eyes like a monkey.

In architecture and temple iconography, Makara is shown in its traditional hybrid glory, but in some folklore art, Makara is displayed simply as a crocodile, as hybrid creatures fell out of favor. Many artistic depictions show that Makara acts as a water vehicle for the gods. The river goddess Ganga, the deity of the Ganges, and Varuna, god of the sea, are usually mounted on Makara. Several gods, including Shiva and Vishnu, can be seen wearing Makara-shaped earrings. In heraldry, Makara is the insignia for the god of love, Kamadeva. The Karava people of Sri Lanka, a remnant from an ancient caste system, also have a ceremonial Makara flag.

Though not a prominent character in literature, Makara is the most widespread creature depicted in Hindu and Buddhist temples throughout India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Cambodia, Nepal, and Tibet. It is a common

feature in decorative arches that surround deity sculptures, gateways, and entryways into sacred rooms. Makara can often be found at the foot of an archway, with their head pointed upward; the arch pillar comes out of Makara's mouth on one side, rises over the archway, and descends into the mouth of the second Makara on the other side of the arch. In this respect, Makara is seen as a protective guardian, but their fierce nature that makes them effective in this role is often overlooked.

Just like crocodiles appearing suddenly to snatch a life away, Makara represents chaos. In Hinduism, chaos is considered necessary; creation and order arise from disorder and eventually return to it, just like the decorative arch coming from one Makara and ending at another.

Such Makara arches (*Makara-torana*) are ubiquitous in Sri Lanka in both temples and ancient royal architecture. The Sri Lankan Karava people, mentioned above, have a traditional story that shows the nature of Makara:

At the behest of his wife, King Aditi was absolving himself in the holy waters of the river Ganges, praying to the god Shiva for a child. Shiva's wife, Umayal, was so moved by King Aditi's prayers that she pleaded with Shiva to fulfill them. Shiva transformed his wife into a baby and sent her floating down the Ganges in a small boat. To prevent the boat from floating past the King, Shiva instructed Makara, who could not refuse, to guide it.

With the help of Makara, the boat reached King Aditi, and when he heard the baby's cries, he knew their prayers had been answered. He took the child home in his arms and, overjoyed, he and his wife, Queen Arunavally, named her Somadanti, of the great waves.

As Makara had finished his obligation, he began to cause chaos. Worsening over the years, he stirred up the deep waters and caused waves that shattered boats to smithereens. The subjects of the kingdom, in increasing distress, laid their problems before King Aditi. When his daughter Somadanti was grown, he proclaimed that, in the name of

Shiva, the hero who ensnared Makara would have his daughter's hand in marriage.

Disguised as a sage, Shiva went down to the kingdom. He transformed sacred texts into a net and brought down the crescent moon to make a golden vessel. Deities came from the heavens to sing, and flowers fell from the sky. Makara beheld the glorious event and contemplated release from his cursed behavior. Joyfully, Makara drew water into his massive jaws and spat out a fountain so high it bathed the heavens.

When Shiva cast the net, Makara felt its sacredness on his body and tamely submitted with no resistance, allowing himself to be caught. Makara blissfully floated to shore and was released from his cursed behavior, which conferred prosperity and plenty upon the kingdom. And Shiva, having successfully ensnared Makara, gained the hand of Somadanti, who was his wife Umayal, in marriage.

This story of Makara's ensnarement highlights how religious teachings were revered as something that could free people from their destructive impulses. It emphasized the power of the gods that such a creature would happily succumb to their wishes: the gods must indeed rule over everything if they can so easily tame Makara, the crocodile of chaos.

Chapter 63: Ponaturi

Origin: Māori FOLKLORE

Kaia was looking forward to getting home to cook the mushrooms she had found, but she was growing concerned that it was getting dark so early. It didn't help that it was so overcast and misty. A flicker of movement between the rocks caught her eye, and she looked towards the

beach. Just a shadow, she told herself and increased her pace. Between another pair of boulders, she saw it again before it darted away, a pale figure, the size of a child, with shaggy blond hair. Oh god, they are out early tonight, she thought. Maybe they would leave her alone. But another face, with bright blue eyes, leered at her around the next rock, and she broke into a run. She had heard what happened if you got abducted, and she urged her legs to go faster.

There was no one to call out to for help, so she saved her breath and ran, not stopping to look back, sure that more than one would be following her. Breathing hard, she reached her home and barged into the kitchen. Please be an ember, please be an ember, she prayed as she charged to the hearth. She pushed the half-burned firewood further into the gray-white ash and blew with her remaining breath. A fiery spark burst forth and rekindled the cooking fire, and Kaia, relieved beyond measure, quickly added more sticks. She couldn't yet bring herself to look out of the window in case pale faces were looking back. She knew she was safe from them now, but it had been a close call with the Ponaturi.

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In New Zealand, there are unfriendly and secretive Patupaiarehe fairies that live in the forests, mountains, and oceans. The amphibious type is called Ponaturi; they live primarily in an underwater realm but also come onto the land to look for raw food. They loathe both fire and sunlight, which are anathemas to them; they are also revolted by the smell of cooked food. For these reasons, they are nocturnal, though they may also be active when it is very misty. They may sleep underwater or on land as long as their home is kept sufficiently dark.

They live in social groups in the same way that people do, but they are hostile to trespassers. They are known to beat, mistreat, or even kill intruders, and red-headed or albino Māori were said to be the children of women who had been abducted by Patupaiarehe.

Ponaturi, like all Patupaiarehe, have pale human-like features, are often described as small in stature, have red or fair hair, and long claws. Alternatively, some Māori stories portray them as being much taller than people. Unlike the Māori, Patupaiarehe are never tattooed, and due to their appearance and disposition, they can be thought of as goblins.

In Māori tribal culture, the expert storyteller memorizes oral literature as genealogies, poetry, and narrative prose to be passed from generation to generation. Pre-European Māori had not developed a writing system, so they used these methods to keep their mythology alive. Incidentally, Europeans with pale skin and fair hair were thought to resemble the Patupaiarehe.

Māori is an excellent example of fluid storytelling, with different variations between tribes, storytellers, and retellings by the same storyteller. No interpretation is more correct than another, and a personalized experience for the listeners was created.

There was once a tribal chief called Rua-pupuke who lived by the sea. His young son had recently drowned, and grief-stricken, he was determined to retrieve his son's body. One night, he swam down, down, down under the waves. While swimming, he saw an underwater building and went to investigate. When he reached it, he saw that it was a house covered in intricate carvings and above the door was a carving with the likeness of his son.

The house was empty except for a woman who worked as the doorkeeper. She explained to Rua-pupuke that it was the home of the Ponaturi, and they had turned his son into a carving when he accidentally trespassed on their territory. She had a fondness for children and so informed Rua-pupuke that the Ponaturi would return before sunrise to sleep because they couldn't survive in the sunlight.

The next day, Rua-pupuke returned to the Ponaturi house in the underwater realm. The doorkeeper nodded; the Ponaturi were all asleep inside. She stepped aside, and Rua-pupuke threw open all of the doors and windows. The Ponaturi all perished, except two who escaped and fled. Rua-pupuke took the carving of his son and some other carved pieces of wood back to the surface, and they were used as patterns, thus introducing wood carving to his tribe.

Patupaiarehe provide a cause for red-headed and albino Māori

children, and Ponaturi, as with other mythical water creatures, offer an explanation for drowning. Patupaiarehe stories were also used as a warning for children to prevent them from straying far from the safety of the village or into deep water. When new skills were acquired, like wood carving and weaving fishing nets, the source of this otherworldly knowledge was often attributed to the secretive and mysterious Ponaturi.

Chapter 64: Vodyanoy

Origin: Slavic Folklore

The tundra surrounding the lake was still mostly white, and it would be a while longer before the scrubby birch burst into green. From his boat, the fisherman took stock while he waited, his net draped over the side. It was a fine spring day, and the ice had finally melted, the water level lifted by the rushing snowmelt careering down the tributaries. The fisherman was wary of the currents this created but believed that the greatest rewards involved risk. To be on the safe side, he removed a glove and sprinkled a generous pinch of tobacco onto the surface of

the water. No sooner had he got his glove back on when he heard a hefty splash, some distance away. He looked for it, thinking it might be a large sturgeon, but couldn't even see ripples.

Then, out of the corner of his eye, the fisherman saw movement off the side of the boat. When he turned to look, he saw the top half of a strange head. With a mischievous glint of fire, two big eyes stared back at him from a pale green face. The fisherman fell to the floor of the boat in fright. When he peered over the side, he saw a wide mouth open, taking in the tobacco. The mouth chewed and grinned at him, then disappeared under the water with the flick of a black tail. The fisherman gaped in awe and shock. He felt his net tug and hoped he hadn't caught it. But when he checked, his net was overflowing with fish. His tobacco, the first offering of the year, had been richly rewarded by Vodyanoy.

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With origins in Slavic paganism, Vodyanoy is a shapeshifting nature spirit that lives in freshwater, and the name means 'watery,' 'aquatic' and 'merman' in Russian. In Russia, Vodyanoy appears as an old frog-like man with green skin and a black scaly fish tail in place of legs. He has a long green beard and hair covered with water weeds. The fingers on his hands, or paws, are webbed, and he rides a half-sunken log making loud slaps or splashes on the water.

Further south, in Czech, Slovene, and Slovak tales, Vodyanoy is called Vodnik and has a more humanoid appearance, with webbed feet, although a tail also features, with the ability to shapeshift. In these stories, he wears clothes and can walk on land but is identified by permanently dripping wet coat tails.

In pre-Christian belief, Vodyanoy was not good or evil but a guardian of the lake or river he resided in who could be offended or pleased. People used to make offerings of food or sacrifice a hen. When appeased, Vodyanoy could ensure plentiful water and successful fishing. However, when angered, he could break dams, cause floods, and drown people and livestock.

As Christianity overtook paganism, Vodyanoy was molded into a synonym for the devil. Stories became more sinister, featuring drowning

for vindictive pleasure, eyes burning like hot coals, and the addition of horns. Common beliefs were that you could avoid being drowned by Vodyanoy if you did not bathe on holy days or without wearing a cross or crossing yourself before entering the water, highlighting Christian influences.

You should also avoid bathing after sunset and near strong currents to avoid being captured or killed. A poem by K. J. Erben, ‘The Water Goblin’, tells the story of a young woman captured by a Vodnik:

The Vodnik sat in a poplar tree, sewing his wedding outfit by the light of the moon. When morning came, the miller’s daughter told her mother she was going to the lake to wash the clothes. Her mother begged her not to because she had a premonition the night before. But the daughter was drawn by an invisible force. As soon as she put the first handkerchief into the water, she fell into the swirling depths. The green man in the poplar cheered and went to join her. The Vodnik married her with fish for bridesmaids, and later, they had a child. The underwater realm was cold and silent like grief in a heart without hope.

The abducted wife sang to the baby of her desperation and grief. Her husband horrified her, and she discovered that he kept human souls under the teacups. She would prefer to be dead on land than a prisoner in his watery court. She sang to her child as it was her only joy. The Vodnik told her to stop singing, or he would turn her into a fish. She begged him to let her visit her mother to say goodbye. He agreed, but she had to leave the child hostage and be back by evening. Mother and daughter were reunited, but when the evening bells rang, the mother would not let her daughter depart. The Vodnik came several times to say she must come back to cook his dinner, make his bed, and feed the child. The daughter begged her mother to let her go for the sake of the baby. The mother refused and told Vodnik that he could eat what he could find, make his own bed, and bring the baby to their doorstep. There was a thud outside the door, and blood seeped beneath it. Vodnik had left the baby but in two halves.

Traditionally neither good nor evil, Vodyanoy was the guardian of lakes and rivers. Transformed from a powerful pagan spirit to a malevolent murderer by Christianity, Vodyanoy became a potent reminder about the protective power of the cross and the dangers of bathing in lakes and rivers after dark.

Chapter 65: Melusine

Origin: European Folklore

Deep in the woods, Raymondin's horse carried him past the fairy fountain. In a reverie, cocooned in his troubles, Raymondin did not notice the woman there. But she noticed him. She stopped his horse and reproved him for not greeting her politely. When she got no response, she was inclined to anger until she saw he was asleep. She tugged his hand to wake him. At first, he was shocked and afraid, but she soothed him with kind words. "There is no battle; I am on your side," she said with a warm smile. Feeling reassured, he admired her beauty, her long golden

hair spilled in glowing waves down past her shoulders, and her white dress shimmered in the splashes of dappled light. She really was the fairest woman he had ever seen, and he dismounted and begged for her forgiveness. Time passed, and he asked her to marry him. She accepted, but only if he promised to grant her a full day and night of privacy each week. He agreed, but one day he would break his vow and live to regret it, discovering his loving wife Melusine was not quite a woman after all.

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Melusine was the guardian fairy of springs and freshwater sources in ancient Europe. Her mother was the fairy Pressina, and her father was a mortal king, King Elinas of Albany, present-day Scotland. When Melusine sought to punish her father for a perceived wrongdoing, Pressina reprimanded her with a curse that would transform her into a hybrid creature every Saturday.

Based on earlier oral folktales, the oldest stories give Melusine a serpent tail and other dragon-like features such as two feet and wings. Later adaptations embellish Melusine's tail as blue-glazed and covered with round silver speckles. There was also a distinct shift in iconography from a serpentine tail to a mermaid's fish-like tale. This was due to her strong associations with water, through springs and bathing, but it also served to make her appearance less gruesome and more appealing. She was sometimes depicted with two fish tails, and some consider her to be the motif behind the two-tailed siren of the ubiquitous Starbucks logo.

Translations of Jean d'Arras's Tale of Melusine from 1478 highlight the suffering and heartbreak caused by broken promises and lost trust:

Raymondin and Melusine had been married for many years. They had nine sons, and their domain was peaceful and prosperous, and agriculture flourished. Raymondin still didn't know why his wife needed a whole day of privacy on a Saturday and spent most of the day in the bath. He had buried his curiosity years ago, but his brother had recently turned it into jealousy by suggesting that Melusine was with another man every week. On hearing this accusation, Raymondin was filled with

suspicion and rushed to the bathing room. He made a small hole in the door with his sword and peeped through. Inside the long marble bath was his wife, but from the navel down her body was a great serpent, as thick as a barrel. He was filled with sorrow, not because of her monstrous transformation, but because she was alone, and he had let the provoking words of his brother get the better of him. He filled the hole in the door with wax so no one else would see. But he had broken his vow to his wife, and now he would lose her. He wept for the entire night.

In the morning, his wife returned and, seeing his distress, asked him what was wrong. Raymondin replied that he had a fever but felt better now she was there. She silently forgave him his trespass, and they both continued as if it had never happened. However, one day, in a fit of anger over an unrelated matter, Raymondin called Melusine a ‘false serpent’ and their children ‘specters.’ He immediately regretted it, but the damage was done, and Melusine’s secret was revealed. With a heavy heart, Melusine explained she was not permitted to stay with him now and was condemned to a life of suffering. They embraced each other, filled with sadness at the loss of their best friend and spouse. Melusine’s parting words to him were advice on the domain and their children. With a painful sigh, she transformed into a tremendous long serpent, left her two clawed footprints on the stone windowsill, and flew off into the sky. Her sad cries circled around the palace, and then she disappeared. Melusine’s heartbroken cries can still be heard in the wails of the wind.

Melusine was a hybrid in more ways than one. Besides her serpentine or piscine transformations, she was of mixed fairy and human birth. In addition, she combined what was, at the time, seen as distinct feminine and masculine roles. She was both a loving matriarch and wielded authority in the domain, building castles and overseeing agricultural practices for the benefit of all. Her stories raised questions about power and gender, as well as the damage that can be done by words spoken in anger and the act of breaking vows made in good faith.

Chapter 66: Abaia

Origin: Melanesian Folklore

The floods had moved the boulders in the river, so Tarlae ventured upstream for a place to bathe. When she found a pool deep enough, between large rocks, she climbed in. The cool water was a delicious respite from the heat and humidity of her island home. The late afternoon light filtered through the tropical leaves, and all was quiet, except for the babbling of the stream and the friendly jungle fowls preening nearby.

As she daydreamed in the water, two large eyes peered out from beneath a rock at the

bottom of the pool. When Tarlae eventually noticed, she quietly slipped out of the water and hastily pulled on her clothes. She was not sure whose watery retreat she had intruded upon, but she had a hunch. It started to rain, and she took shelter under a tree at the water's edge. She kept very still and watched the pool intently. Dusk fell, and she waited even though her clothes were soaked by the rain. Soon a large head emerged from the pool, followed by a sleek, thick, serpentine body. It writhed its way upstream, moving over the boulders with ease. Other eels had emerged from their secret hiding places and moved equally silently, but the one from Tarlae's pool was by far the largest. She was sure her hunch was right. Abaia was on the move.

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In beliefs extending from the Solomon Islands to Fiji and the Vanuatu Islands, Abaia is a giant eel that lives in the bottom of a freshwater lake. It is said to have magical powers enabling it to whip up large waves with its muscular tail. It is also linked to heavy rain and flooding and protects all of the creatures in its lake as if they are its children, acting fiercely territorial. Incidentally, in Gilbertese, spoken in Fiji by the Banaban people, abaia means 'territory.'

Melanesia's most enormous freshwater eels are giant mottled eels, and females can grow to over two meters in length. As well as their large size, they have an enigmatic reputation. They are born at sea and migrate up rivers and streams to live in freshwater pools and lakes, where they remain for decades. They can travel out of water happily, from waterway to waterway, as long as conditions are damp. Rows of sharp teeth mark them as carnivores. They hunt at night and are usually completely hidden during the day in networks of underwater caves or channels under rocks. The largest giant eels are a dark mottled brown with pale undersides. Some females live to one hundred years old before returning to their largely unknown breeding grounds in the ocean, where they spawn and are never seen again. If Abaia was not imagined as a giant mottled eel, it was almost certainly inspired by one. The most cited story of Abaia demonstrates a perceived link between tragic events and supernatural causes.

In the village of Gavi, the people no longer eat fish, and for a good

reason. There was once a man who went hunting on his own, except for his dog. They walked and walked, but they only found one wallaby, so they walked some more. They came across a circular lake, Lake Wapogi. The dog ran up to the lake and quickly caught a fish in its jaws. The man was pleased to see it was teeming with fish. He didn't know there was a magic eel living at the bottom of the lake. He marked the route, returned home, and roasted and shared the wallaby. The following morning he told everyone to come with him to a place with lots of fish, and they did so, leaving the young children in the care of the older children.

When they arrived at Lake Wapogi, the women cast their hand nets, and the men built a drying rack to smoke the fish, prawns, and eels, for they had already caught many. One skillful woman even caught hold of Abaia, but it slipped from her grip. When evening came, the people ate and slept. But the eels did not rest. Abaia instructed all of the remaining eels to travel to every river and bring the water spirits, so the people who ate from the lake might be punished. When the eels returned, dark clouds followed them, and heavy rain fell until the land was flooded and all the people had drowned. Only one woman survived. She, being a witch, had recognized that the fish were not ordinary fish but belonged to Abaia, and she had not eaten any. She escaped the floodwaters by climbing a tree, and they only stopped rising when she reluctantly threw her dog, which had eaten some fish, into the water. When the waters subsided, she returned to the village to raise the children who had been left behind, warning them that they should never eat fish in case they belonged to Abaia.

Abaia represents the unknown lurking in the depths, the idea that there is something threatening and unseen under the surface of lakes and deep pools. The freshwater eels of Melanesia are secretive by nature, creeping over the land at night and traveling great distances inland and out to sea as part of their life cycle. Abaia reflects the mysterious character of freshwater eels, the power of water, and acts as a reminder that natural resources and wildlife should be respected and preserved.

If one female giant mottled eel never returned to the sea to spawn, maybe it would just keep growing to an enormous size, and with access to a hidden underground cave network, no one would ever know.

Chapter 67: Adaro

Origin: Melanesian Folklore

I can't remember how I got here. I am not dead, but I am not living either. They are keeping me under the sea but took me up to the surface to gloat and show me my body. It was sat on the beach, looking out to sea with a forlorn expression, waiting for me to return. But I don't think my body could see me. It had turned the white-gray color of a bonito fish, and I barely recognized myself. I tried to call out but couldn't. Strong webbed fingers gripped me, although I can't explain how they can hold a shadow so tightly. They took me back below and gave me a

new name, and now I can't remember mine. I refuse their strange food when I remember to because it makes me feel further from my home, like it is floating away from me. I try not to look at their vicious faces. They move swiftly through the water with their menacing shark fins on their heads and flippered feet. I wait for my wise grandmother. My only hope is a dream-rescue, to release me from the Adaro of the deep. I am not sure if she will find me.

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The Adaro of the deep are malevolent spirits that live in the ocean. In the Solomon Islands, they are called adaro ni matawa, spirits of the deep sea, as opposed to the adaro or 'spirits' that haunt the land. The Adaro of the sea spread sickness and death by shooting needle-nosed garfish or poisonous flying fish at people and stealing their souls by drowning them. The Adaro are humanoid in shape with fins instead of feet and webbed fingers. They have gills behind their ears and on the top of their head is a shark's dorsal fin. This is often accompanied by a spike similar to a swordfish's, giving them a threatening appearance to match their evil tendencies.

In antiquity, Solomon Islanders made carvings of the Adaro to protect the canoe huts of chiefs. Offerings of almonds, taro, and flying-fox teeth were made to try to ensure successful fishing trips. Fishermen were said to look out for rainbows as this was a pathway of the Adaro who liked to stalk the souls of people at sea, often young men out fishing.

As well as taking the spirit or soul, causing the death of the physical body, some accounts describe 'shade-theft' where the spirit is held captive by the Adaro, but the physical body remains alive. However, the victim suffers from shade-separation sickness, called sigi nunu, as the body becomes increasingly detached from the physical world, refusing to eat or speak for example, as the stolen spirit becomes more integrated into the underworld realm of the Adaro. The only hope is for a magician, or dream-curer, to retrieve the stolen spirit and return it to the body.

Children are said to be particularly vulnerable to Adaro attacks

because they are more likely to unwittingly offend the Adaro, leading them to be drowned. Spirits of the dead or taken may appear to the living, but they will forever be invisible to their relatives.

The boy was only young at the time, and one day he was canoeing on the sea. The weather was fine, and the wind and waves were gentle. A strange fish flopped into his canoe as if it had been thrown. Then, the deep-sea Adaro capsized his vessel and made an opening in the water that he fell through into their underworld realm. He had lived with his mother and father before that, and they searched for him. As evening came, they wept bitterly when they still could not find him. Later, his spirit tried to visit his parents, but they couldn't see him. A stolen spirit is always invisible to relatives, and they would never lay eyes on him again.

The Adaro are ruled by a chief named Ngorieru, whose image is featured on the ten cents coin of the Solomon Islands. Ngorieru is depicted in the same way as the Adaro he presides over, but some carvings give him three dorsal fins on his head, with the additional two taking the place of ears. His hands are also fin-like as opposed to webbed fingers. On the ten cents coin, Ngorieru has a more fish-like head than the Adaro and a tail reminiscent of a dolphin.

The Adaro were an explanation for drowned children and fishermen in particular, but the beliefs also offered an explanation for mental afflictions where an individual may appear to be not fully present. People thought that part of their soul was being held captive by the Adaro, and that's why their loved ones seemed lost to them, even though they were still alive.

Melanesia was subjected to European colonization and Christianity, and missionaries in the Solomon Islands tried to persuade people that the Adaro were fallen angels doing the work of the devil. Due to colonization, much of Melanesia is now Christian, and many of the hundreds of languages are creoles.

Accounts of the Adaro highlight how identity is closely intertwined

with family and homeland in Melanesian culture. Under foreign rule, many people were forced to leave their homes to make way for mining or to work on cotton plantations on other islands. Young people being taken over the sea in this way offers a stark example of separating individuals from their homeland, family, and identity, just as the Adaro did.

Chapter 68: Bukavac

Origin: Slavic Folklore

Enjoying the warm evening, Dmitar had been for a walk and was returning home along the riverbank. A keen birdwatcher, he had admired the starlings as they put on an excellent murmuration display, swirling around like shoals of fish in the darkening sky. Dmitar heard a booming cry that made him jump. It came from the water. It's just a bittern, he thought, even though it sounded nothing like a bird. Spooky how such a big un-birdlike sound can come from a small waterbird. He mentally recited some facts to calm himself down. Probably a Eurasian

bittern, yes, Botaurus stellaris, speckled plumage. Nicknamed the bog-bull for its unlikely voice. He felt better already. Specialized esophagus muscles, that was it.

It's just a bittern, Dmitar reminded himself when he heard it again, closer, although his heart still raced without his approval. After a few more steps onward, he saw a large patch of reeds flattened as if they had been sat on by a giant. At the water's edge lay a cow, perfectly motionless, half in and half out of the water, nostrils submerged. It looked like its neck had been crushed. There was a shadowy movement, and a horned head on a many-legged body leaped out of the reeds towards another nearby cow. Thoughts of waterbirds vanished from Dmitar's mind, and he turned and fled before Bukavac crushed the life from his body too.

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Bukavac is an elusive and regionally-specific creature that belongs to Syrmia, an area straddling the border of Croatia and Serbia between the Danube and Sava rivers. Allegedly, strangled animals were once found near the River Sava. The blame was placed on Bukavac, a water-dwelling creature who lurks in marshes, lakes, and rivers. It is said to leap out at night and choke livestock or people passing by. Because it lurks underwater and amid the reeds and grasses, there is little consensus of what it looks like. Bukavac is generally imagined to resemble an enormous frog or lizard, with six legs, antlers or gnarled horns, slimy skin, and a long tail. As it seems to kill but not eat its victims, it can be considered purely malicious, leading people to refer to Bukavac as a demon.

Bukavac makes a loud hideous shout in the night, and buka means 'noise' in Croatian, leading some to say that its name means 'noisy.' However, the word bukavac translates to 'bittern' in Croatian, a waterbird. The secretive Eurasian bittern is rarely seen out in the open, preferring to skulk in reed beds and grasses surrounding water bodies, just like Bukavac. The call of the male bittern resembles a bellowing bull and the boom of a fog-horn. On calm nights it can easily be heard several miles away. Calls are most often heard on spring evenings during the birds' mating season. Traditionally it was a mystery how a relatively small bird could make such a loud, low-pitched sound, so people attributed it to a mysterious beast.

Another similar creature from Slavic folklore is the Drekavac, meaning ‘screamer.’ Like Bukavac, it makes loud, terrifying noises and is more active at night and in the spring, like the bittern. The story of ‘Brave Mita and the Drekavac,’ by Branko Ćopić, has many things in common with Bukavac of Syrmia.

One spring evening, fishermen were hauling nets in the River Sava. From the darkness came a piercing call that made the fishermen quake with fear. The oldest fisherman whispered that it was a howler. The fishermen were superstitious and believed that the call of a howler foretold disease, caused boats to sink and carts to run into muddy swamps and canals. The fishermen quickly pulled in their nets, ignoring the carp and other fish that were jumping out. They hurried back to their village and told everyone what had happened. The villagers were horrified and locked themselves in their homes, too frightened to even cross the street. Only Mita, the twelve-year-old son of a fisherman, didn’t believe the story. He was an intelligent, educated boy, strong and brave, and he didn’t believe in witches, werewolves, or howlers.

By the third night of no fishing, there was a noticeable shortage of food, so Mita decided to go and discover the creature that screamed in the night. In his father’s boat, he followed the strange calls across the river. Mita ran aground on the opposite shore and stepped barefoot into the mud. He shivered in fear when he heard the scream very close but thought it sounded a bit like a wild duck. He crept into the reeds and saw the culprit making its strange sound by the light of the moon. Mita managed to catch it and wrapped it up in a piece of fishing net. He took it to the village and showed everyone their howler. The bird was a bittern, most vocal in spring, scaring the superstitious who thought it was a monster. And from that day, no one in Mita’s village believed in the howler anymore and went back to fishing on the river.

This story is consistent with Bukavac being a type of Drekavac associated with water, specifically in the Syrmia region. When people didn’t know the haunting sound was made by a bittern, they would have been more likely to call the mystery creature ‘screamer’ than ‘bittern.’

The secretive skulking behavior of Bukavac has a lot in common with the bittern and was used to explain the strange sounds emitted from the reeds on spring nights. Bukavac illustrates how adept human minds are at filling in the blanks to ascribe meaning to the unknown.

Chapter 69: Timingila

Origin: Hindu Mythology

The ocean surged and covered the land in devastating floodwaters. The Sage felt helpless and exhausted as he searched for a place to cling to, swept along by the raging water. Weak with hunger and thirst, battered by wind and waves, he had lost track of time and any sense of direction. There were monsters in the water, and it seemed only his prayers had saved him from being devoured thus far. Every so often, he saw a giant gray fin coming towards him, and then it would disappear. The Sage continued to pray to the gods he loved so well, and when he opened his eyes, he saw a tree. Its

uppermost branches were sweeping out over the water, debris dangling like prayer flags. He swam towards it and, with great effort, hauled himself out.

On the branch above him, he was amazed to see a cooing baby lying on a leaf. He marveled at it, and the baby laughed. Then, with an intake of breath, the baby inhaled the Sage into its mouth. Initially enveloped in gloom, the Sage heard a voice and knew intuitively that it was Lord Vishnu. From inside the baby's stomach, Lord Vishnu showed the Sage the entire universe: the sky and the earth, the heavens and the oceans. With an exhalation, the Sage found himself returned to the branch, next to the baby, sleeping peacefully. In the distance, the giant shark-like creature still moved in wide circles around the tree. He knew Lord Vishnu, appearing as the baby, had saved him from Timingila.

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Timingilas are mentioned in several Vedic texts and are usually included in lists of sea-dwelling creatures such as turtles, whales, sharks, and Makaras. In Sanskrit, Timingila means 'whale swallower' because they were thought to be so large and predatory that they could swallow a whale in one go. From the descriptions in the Vedic texts, the Timingila is an enormous ocean-dwelling beast so vast it looked like a great rock submerged in the ocean rather than an animal.

The Timingila has been compared to the Megalodon shark, one of the largest and most powerful ocean predators to have ever existed. Megalodons were thought to be coastal predators that probably targeted some species of whales, as well as sea turtles and seals. However, the Megalodon was still much smaller than blue whales, the largest animals known to have ever lived. In addition, the Megalodon went extinct well before the emergence of homo sapiens, so no human would have ever seen one. Nevertheless, the Megalodon is the most relevant template for imagining what the Timingila would have looked like.

In the Hindu epic the Ramayana, the hero Lord Ram saw Timingilas in the sea between India and Sri Lanka.

Ram needed to traverse the ocean to rescue his wife Sita from the demon lord Ravana in the kingdom of Lanka. The problem was, he had no way to cross, and Varuna, the sea god, was not answering him. Ram grew tired of inaction and swore he would kill every sea monster in the

ocean if it meant he could lead his army across to Lanka. Rama shot his fiery arrows into the murky depths, and various tremendous sea monsters were dashed upon the shore. Startled by the disruption, many more sea creatures, including the fiery-eyed Timingilas and Makaras, whales, and sea turtles, raised their heads. Ram's brother Lakshman tried to reason with him and calm his fury, but Rama insisted that he would kill every sea creature if he had to. Before Ram wreaked further havoc, the sea god Varuna appeared at last and explained that the ocean was needed as part of the balance of the universe. Varuna bid Nala the monkey, the divine engineer and a member of Rama's army, to construct a bridge so they could safely pass over the sea monsters and into the kingdom of Lanka. When it was built, Varuna held the ocean steady while Rama and his army crossed Nala's magnificent bridge and continued their quest to rescue Sita.

Nala's bridge, also called Adam's Bridge and Rama Sethu, can be seen clearly in NASA photography, although it is natural rather than man- or monkey-made. Additionally, a thin spit of sand and coral islands historically connected India and Sri Lanka and is referred to in several sources. The Gulf of Mannar remains one of Asia's most biodiverse aquatic habitats, hosting a range of sea turtles, sharks, dolphins, sea cows, and whales that were no doubt the inspiration behind Timingila.

In the Vedic texts, Timingilas are invoked to represent the danger and destructive powers of the ocean but also destruction in general. Great warriors that could destroy many soldiers were compared to the Timingilas as great devourers. For example, in the epic Mahabharata, the hero Arjun was compared to a fish, even though he was considered a great archer, while the enemy commanders were compared to Timingilas because they could 'swallow up' so many soldiers. The story is used to highlight the protective powers of Lord Krishna to save Arjun against such a destructive enemy.

While Timingilas have been likened to the long-extinct Megalodon, and thought to be large enough to swallow some species of whale whole,

they were also a broad analogy for a devouring, destructive force.

Chapter 70: Rusalka

Origin: SLAVIC FOLKLORE

Along the riverbank, Benedek tended to his crops under the warm June sun. The land was fertile here, and Benedek felt sure his yield would be high again this year. He rested in the shade under a willow tree and watched the birds wheel and wend, waiting for the evening sun to cast its golden hue across the fields. Dragonflies zipped across the surface of the river as it began to ripple. A young woman emerged from the water, wearing nothing but a flowing gown of fine mist. She stepped gently over the grass towards Benedek's tree. He quickly scrambled away,

knowing that he must be careful—his mother had always warned him to stay away from nymphs and never accept their hand for a dance.

But she was so beautiful; he was bewitched by the vision before him. Her slender body, her long honey-colored hair, and green eyes were entrancing. He couldn't tear his gaze away until the crunch of footsteps snapped him out of it. It was Tamas, his neighbor, walking straight towards the willow tree where the nymph now danced. The moon was rising as Tamas reached for her outstretched hand. "Tamas, no!" *he shouted, but it was too late. Benedek ran home as fast as he could, breathlessly relaying the scene to his mother.*

The following morning, they returned to the tree. There was no sign of Tamas or the nymph. The only indication of anything strange was a ring of long, lush grass around the tree. Benedek's mother clasped her hands together and whispered, "Rusalka!"

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Across eastern Europe and Russia, a rusalka was a nature spirit with pagan origins. They were often linked with agricultural fertility, as they rose from the rivers and gave nurturing water to the crops. Similar to mermaids and sirens, rusalki took the form of beautiful young women who were enchanting to men.

Around the banks of the Danube, the rusalki were known to bewitch human men with their beautiful songs. In Russia, rusalki were considered older, unkempt, and aggressive: they ambushed unsuspecting men rather than enticing them. In Poland, rusalki were younger if they inhabited waterways or older if they lived in the forests. In all cases, if you looked at them closely, their hair would turn green, and their faces would distort, revealing their actual appearance.

Local variations could reflect the different agriculture in the regions. Growing conditions were favorable along the banks of the Danube, so the rusalki were seen in a more generous and positive light. The rusalki had more negative connotations in northern Russia, where the climate is harsher, and harvests were not as bountiful.

The poem 'Rusalka' by Alexander Pushkin, from 1819, describes an alluring rusalka:

There was once an old hermit who had spent the summer praying, studying sacred texts, and fasting in a grove by a lake. Feeling he was nearing the end of his life, he dug his own grave and prayed for the blessings of the saints.

One evening, as it was getting dark, the hermit was praying as usual. He suddenly felt inexplicably troubled and afraid and looked towards the lake where the mists were lifting off the water. The waves grew twice as tall as usual and then became calm again. Then, a pale, naked maiden lightly stepped ashore and sat silently on the bank gazing at him and brushing her hair and the water from her arms. She was luscious and seductive as she beckoned him over, but when he did not go, she disappeared back into the lake.

That night, the hermit did not sleep, and the next day he did not pray. When evening came, the rusalka appeared again, trying to lure him to her at the water's edge with seductive sounds and gestures. On the third night, the hermit was waiting for her on the shore, and by morning, he was gone. Although, a crowd of merchants was heard saying they had seen a gray beard floating in the water.

In the 19th Century, rusalki legends took a darker turn, pivoting towards more vengeful enticement of unsuspecting men to their deaths. In the newer retellings, a rusalka was an undead spirit, neither mortal nor immortal, that may have drowned or been murdered near the water. For example, if a woman took her own life in the water or was drowned intentionally by someone else, she would live out the rest of her years on earth as a rusalka. Some stories indicate that a rusalka was a mistress to a married man who fell pregnant with a child that her partner did not want, so he drowned them both to avoid confessing to his wife.

The rusalki were said to be at their most dangerous during Rusalki Week in early June. During this time, the rusalki came out of the rivers to sing and dance and must be avoided at all costs. To placate any ill feelings the rusalki may have towards the villagers, offerings of eggs and garlands would sometimes be left, and a birch tree could be named

in their honor. At the end of the week, there would be a ritualistic burial or banishment of the rusalki to keep them off the land in an effort to keep the menfolk safe for the rest of the year.

Conclusion

In every culture throughout history, myths, folktales, and legends populated with fantastical creatures were told to educate and entertain. These stories helped people attribute meaning and order to an otherwise chaotic and often dangerous, pre-science world. The role of myth, folklore, and legend was to explain the unknown, provide cautionary tales that warned against dangers, promote moral virtues, and offer spiritual messages to give a sense of hope and purpose.

As suggested in the introduction to this book, creatures may represent the actual animal they resemble, a force or element of nature, or things about ourselves as humans. For example, Arion, from Greek mythology, was the archetypal horse, fast and brave. The sea monster Cetus, from Greek mythology, represented the potential violence of the ocean. Ipotanes, specifically the Satyrs, represented hedonism, overindulgence, and a lack of moral virtue.

We have seen that creatures and gods represent the duality of human nature and that even the gods, who represent the virtues of humans, have bestial qualities. We have met many beasts, hybrids, and shapeshifters from cultures around the world, and some striking similarities are now apparent. Some stories from different parts of the world are very similar such as the cautionary tale not to ride an unknown horse. In both the Scottish Kelpie and the French Cheval Mallet folktales, the horse bolts, and the rider dies, commonly by drowning.

Many myths were recorded when writing was done by men to be read or studied by men, and thus they reflect the patriarchal societies that were prevalent at the time, though there must have been many other stories that have been lost because they were not written down. In the remaining records of Greek mythology, physical abuse is not uncommon, though it is often glossed over in contemporary accounts, or alternative versions are favored to show consensus. For example,

scholars commonly agree that Poseidon had his way with Medusa and Demeter, but alternative accounts of courting in flower-filled meadows were favored as societies changed.

Greek mythology, in particular, has a tendency to portray beautiful women with what it termed undesirable characteristics, such as independence and power, as half-beast, as if those characteristics go against nature itself. They are written as warnings to men; women may appear beautiful, but they were believed to be untrustworthy, manipulative, and sure to bring downfall to man. For example, Medusa used to be very beautiful but could now turn men to stone, Echidna was beautiful but deadly with her own agenda, and later versions of Lamia were as a deadly seductress, much like the Slavic Rusalka who tempted men into the water. So the message was that men should control their lust and women should be kept as subordinates. Even though Greek mythology had many powerful female monsters, they were seen as abominations, cautioning men of the true inner nature of women if they were given any freedom.

Thus, the categories of creatures often have common themes across cultures:

Arthropods have a wide range of representations depending on the perceived characteristics of the creature; they can be seen as a source of mischief and malice or creativity and knowledge. Ants, for example, are considered hardworking and industrious, like the Myrmidons of Greek mythology. Spiders are prevalent in myth, folktale, and legend and are often portrayed as dangerous due to potentially venomous spider bites. For example, Tsuchigumo and Jorogumo are both deadly spiders from Japanese folklore. However, Arachne is associated with weaving in Greek mythology, and Anansi, from African mythology, is an intelligent trickster.

Birds, especially birds of prey, are shown as majestic protectors, a prevalent theme in Hindu mythology, exemplified by Garuda, Gandaberunda, and Jatayu. Birds are often used to highlight human

values; for example, the Norse ravens Hugin and Munin represent knowledge, the kite Jatayu represents bravery and self-sacrifice, and the Japanese hybrid Itsumade calls for respect for the suffering and death of others.

Wolves and dogs are almost always associated with power and death because of their ferocious predatory nature. For example, the multi-headed dogs Orthrus and Cerberus from Greek mythology are the particularly aggressive opponents of heroes. The giant and vicious wolves Fenrir and Amarok from Norse and Inuit mythology are also violent killers. However, the she-wolf Amarok does have a much more complex character with a nurturing side visible in some stories.

Snakes, like wolves, represent power and death due to the threat they pose to human life, especially significant in ancient times when people lived closer to animals. Some of the most fearsome monsters were serpents or part-serpent. For example, we have seen the multi-headed Yamata no Orochi from Japanese mythology who claims human sacrifices. There is also the mighty Typhon with serpent coils for legs from Greek mythology, whose sole aim was to overthrow the gods of Olympus. Similarly, the humongous serpent Jörmungandr from Norse mythology surrounded the whole of Midgard and would play a part in the downfall of the gods.

Ungulates, particularly horses, represent speed, freedom, and bravery because they allowed travel and gave an advantage in battle. Important mounts for heroes, prophets, and angels were Arion, Buraq, and Haizum, exemplifying loyal service and often purity. In other horses, their speed made them deadly, as seen with the lethal water Kelpie and Cheval Mallet.

Aquatic creatures are most often used to represent the natural forces of the sea and other bodies of water. They may offer explanations for natural phenomena, like the Greek Cetus and Norse Jörmungandr do for tidal waves and tsunamis. Aquatic creatures are also commonly used to explain drowning, as in the Slavic Rusalka, Scottish Kelpie and Selkie,

and the Māori Ponaturi, all of whom can drag you underwater. The Selki-folk are capable of drowning people as revenge, but most Selkie stories are more comforting, a way to explain drowning by saying the lost person has turned into a seal and returned to their natural home.

Most mythologies had powerful female goddesses, but they often represented female spheres of life like childbearing and marriage and almost always acted strongly to uphold the patriarchy, lending it legitimacy. An example of this is the goddess Athena punishing Medusa for violating her shrine, despite Medusa being the victim of molestation by a male god. Often goddesses and mortal women in Greek mythology were only there to help the male hero, get rescued and marry someone, or give birth to someone.

Some stories tell us about the nature of animals themselves, such as Makara from Hindu mythology, a hybrid inspired by the gharial, exemplifies the nature of crocodiles, lurking under the surface, ready to strike. Other stories tell us about natural phenomena. In ancient Greece, volcanic activity was attributed to Typhon's entrapment under Mount Etna, causing eruptions when he tried to escape. In the Philippines, there are two particularly exquisite examples in the stories of Bakunawa, attempting to eat the last moon causing lunar eclipses, and in the story of Anggitay, we are told why rainbows appear after the rain.

The majority of the stories that have been recorded have something to say about human behavior, highlighting what is virtuous and what is a vice or folly. For example, gold is typically linked to greed. The metal-eating bird Alicanto from Chilean legend, Fafnir the gold hoarding dragon, and Anggitay the gold-seeking horse-woman hybrid warn of greed and the perils of a self-serving attitude. They all illustrate how greed brings suffering and will lead you astray. Alicanto may lead you off a cliff to your death, Fafnir is consumed by misery and isolated from his family, and Anggitay spends her days chasing gold that is only an illusion.

Many stories provide cautionary tales, and some are directed

particularly at children or their parents, reminding them to keep a watchful eye on their surroundings. Lamia, from Greek mythology, preys on children, devouring them, though in later poetry it is men; Sigbin's favorite delicacy is the heart of a child in Filipino folklore. Water Kelpies, from Scottish folklore, particularly like to take children on their backs to their underwater abodes, and in Māori culture, children were told not to stray far or the Ponaturi would get them.

Though the societies we live in have changed, some things have not. The human brain is still wired for story. It is human nature to wonder at the world, consider what types of behavior can help us live a good life, and seek comfort and hope in difficult times. And we do this by communicating with one another; storytelling just happens to be one of the oldest methods of achieving this. Many ancient myths, folktales, and legends echo familiar human existential concerns about life, such as 'Who am I?' , 'Why am I here?' and other universal questions that persist to this day.

There are many other creatures left to explore and other countries and cultures that have not been covered in this book. Hopefully, you will be inspired to find out more about some of these cultures or creatures, or uncover some new ones. I really hope people will continue to record, translate, and share their traditional stories for everyone to enjoy and benefit from. It is the retelling that keeps the stories— and their creatures—alive in our imaginations so they will not be forgotten.

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Note from the Author:

None of this work would have been possible without the wealth of knowledge that already exists out there. I, Zayden Stone, hope to be able to add to the wealth of references for all future folklorists. To write this book, I have spent hours carefully going through different sources. And with that I'd like to remind the reader, that a non-fiction book is always a result of best efforts. Mythologies and folktales present an interesting opportunity where stories have multiple renditions based on the author. So I hope the reader absorbs this book in the same vein - a perspective and not an absolute truth.

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About the Author

Zayden Stone is a self proclaimed folklorist. As a child, while he watched his cousins and friends play with action figurines, he was swallowed up by the world of mythology. He let the stories of ancient cultures transport him to an imaginary world where magical beasts roamed the planet freely. He would often re-imagine these stories told from the perspective of these mythical creatures and would wonder what they would have had to say.

It has been a life long dream of Zayden's to combine all the creatures that he has grown up reading about, into a comprehensive illustrated guide for others to read. This book is an ode to his own childhood and fascination for ancient tales.